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Performance As Public Work: Youth As Civic Actors For Policy And Practice In Liberia

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Abstract

Research on the civic engagement and citizenship education of youth in Africa rarely considers their cultural production. Based on one year of ethnographic data collection (September 2018-August 2019) at a youth theater company in Liberia, of which I am the Founder and Executive Director, this performance ethnography examines the process of creating popular theatre as it draws from the lived experiences of participants while it aims to change the very systems and structures that shape their opportunities and capabilities. In analyzing the interactions between youth and their peers, their communities and members of the international community, this study offers a theory of change for how young people in Liberia transition from perceived beneficiaries to civic actors. I conceive of citizenship broadly, seeking to understand how young people in Liberia engage with and utilize artistic performance-based practices as a form of emergent participatory citizenship which shapes their political socialization. Young people in Liberia strategically navigate differential power between themselves and international development personnel as evidence of embodied cosmopolitanism that encompasses the skills, knowledge and attitudes often reserved for characterizing the global citizenship practices of primarily white youth from the global North. Through interactions with international persons within NGOs that fund their theatre projects, they integrate global matters of concern into their projects, thus reframing them as local problems and reorienting themselves as civic actors in everyday performances of global citizenship. On the interpersonal level, theatre arts contribute to the development of crucial bonds between actors, which may lay the foundation for shifting from identity-based to membership-based civic status. I find that these transformative moments leave the stage and permeate their everyday lives reshaping the social relations that perpetuate gender-based, educational, and health inequities. My research demonstrates how these strategic navigations and crucial bonds are illuminated in everyday performances that build upon the concept of embodied cosmopolitanism as a form of global citizenship education. I argue that this iterative process of engagement and training in popular theatre gives youth the tools they need to strategically craft everyday performances of citizenship.

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PERFORMANCE AS PUBLIC WORK

YOUTH AS CIVIC ACTORS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE IN LIBERIA

Jasmine L. Blanks Jones

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This dissertation is dedicated to my grandparents

John A. Blanks, Civil Rights activist

Louis J. Cameron, musician

Revella G. Blanks, school counselor

Elizabeth Cameron, social worker

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[1] Because most of the names of B4 Youth Theatre participants can be found online or on social media (and in an upcoming documentary!) their names are used throughout. However, I also follow our own naming convention for characters as we use each other's names and create new character names. In sections where content may pose some risk, I have created character names or pseudonyms.

ABSTRACT

PERFORMANCE AS PUBLIC WORK:
YOUTH AS CIVIC ACTORS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE IN LIBERIA

Jasmine L. Blanks Jones
Sigal Ben-Porath
John L. Jackson, Jr.

Research on the civic engagement and citizenship education of youth in Africa rarely considers their cultural production. Based on one year of ethnographic data collection (September 2018-August 2019) at a youth theater company in Liberia, of which I am the Founder and Executive Director, this performance ethnography examines the process of creating popular theatre as it draws from the lived experiences of participants while it aims to change the very systems and structures that shape their opportunities and capabilities. In analyzing the interactions between youth and their peers, their communities and members of the international community, this study offers a theory of change for how young people in Liberia transition from perceived beneficiaries to civic actors. I conceive of citizenship broadly, seeking to understand how young people in Liberia engage with and utilize artistic performance-based practices as a form of emergent participatory citizenship which shapes their political socialization.

Young people in Liberia strategically navigate differential power between themselves and international development personnel as evidence of embodied cosmopolitanism that encompasses the skills, knowledge and attitudes often reserved for characterizing the global citizenship practices of primarily white youth from the global North. Through interactions with international persons within NGOs that fund their

theatre projects, they integrate global matters of concern into their projects, thus reframing them as local problems and reorienting themselves as civic actors in everyday performances of global citizenship. On the interpersonal level, theatre arts contribute to the development of crucial bonds between actors, which may lay the foundation for shifting from identity-based to membership-based civic status. I find that these transformative moments leave the stage and permeate their everyday lives reshaping the social relations that perpetuate gender-based, educational, and health inequities. My research demonstrates how these strategic navigations and crucial bonds are illuminated in everyday performances that build upon the concept of embodied cosmopolitanism as a form of global citizenship education. I argue that this iterative process of engagement and training in popular theatre gives youth the tools they need to strategically craft everyday performances of citizenship.

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ACRONYMS

B4YT/B4: Burning Barriers Building Bridges Youth Theatre

CBO: Community-Based Organization

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

iNGO: International Non-Governmental Organization

LD: Liberian Dollars

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

PAC: Parent Advisory Committee

PPE: Personal Protective Equipment

SDH: Social Determinants of Health

TfD: Theatre for Development

USD: United States Dollars

TRC: Truth & Reconciliation Commission

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Photo of article from the Inquirer newspaper in Liberia, author Garmonyou Wilson. Photo taken by author, August 17, 2010. p. 5

Figure 2. B4 Youth Theatre Ebola drama team featured in USA Today with UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2015/03/23/orlando-bloom-visits-ebola-ravaged-liberia/70338108/ Retrieved January 14, 2021. p. 89

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: Exit Center (Background)

I would have been what many called an "Ebola refugee" had I been Liberian to start. But I wasn't, nor did I experience forced migration or the hauntings of an all-too-recent civil war which like Ebola, killed many and drove others far from home. I can only bear witness to the hardships and determination of the youth that have allowed me to enter their lives and share in their story. In 2014, I had been beckoned to return to the US as fear of this understudied virus crept across the globe and borders began to close. Had I known then that the lessons that I was learning by working with youth civic actors- artists who change the world through democratic performance would have such great implications for the current pandemic, I would have documented far more. These humble pages share what I have learned through collective embodied praxis - rehearsal, mimetic rendering, kinetic performance, all of which have drawn me closer to my research collaborators by showing us just how similar we are while highlighting stark contrasts in the way we take up space in this world where difference often yields disparities.

In this ethnography, a performative anthropology awakens the realization that both researcher and researched are performing for one another (Fabian, 1990). In my role as Founder and Executive Director of Burning Barriers Building Bridges Youth Theatre (B4YT) in Liberia, West Africa, I have had the privilege of partnering with young people to create pathways to leadership through the arts. I created a program model with classes in community organizing strategies, music, dance and drama resulting in youths' own original performances on issues they identify as being important. I have learned first-

hand that they will not be defined as at-risk or disadvantaged but by what they are able to accomplish given the necessary information and resources. Through my mentorship and teaching of youth artists in Liberia over the past decade, I have trained competent artists, organizers, and educators who have become my research collaborators. Our shared research experiences build their capacity through skills training in a context where young Africans are often the subjects of research. I exercise ethical engagement and interactions with the youth in this program by extending paid opportunities for them to conduct trainings for development projects and pass on their learning to other Liberians. In this way, I meet their expectations of me (as a foreigner) and the organization in a way that feels honest and honors our mutual contributions. The effects are tremendous. Liberians across ethnic group, age and gender learn from and with Liberian youth instead of perpetuating the epistemic violence embedded in the constant performance of expertise from the global North. Small steps are taken to strategically chip away at an extractive system rooted in colonialism. I offer this example to demonstrate the multiple everyday performances embedded in the ethnographic process, as well as, in my role as an arts administrator and theatre practitioner. The day-to-day challenges of working in complex systems with those who have historically been excluded necessitate specific kinds of performances- cultural performances of professionalism, performances of knowledge-bearing, and performances of need and provision.

I entered the Ph.D. program at the University of Pennsylvania after Ebola shook my perception of youth citizenship work. Having served as the primary administrator and implementer of programming for the theatre company for four years at that point, I had

never left programming to run without me despite our model being based on empowerment. When the Ebola crisis made it so that I had to leave, I had to reconsider what I thought I knew about education and what I believed to be true about young Black people in times of hardship i.e. that we were resilient, creative, and could make a difference. 2014-15 marked the first year the program ran on its own, completely under Liberian leadership with a National Director who was still in his 20s. And that was the greatest year of impact the program had ever seen as the youth created awareness dramas that reached over 300,000 people saving many lives. Now as I complete the Ph.D., I look back over another five years of experience, learning, and data and realize that not only have I changed, but so has the organization. The children who boldly took to the streets with their drama teams now comprise the entire instructional staff. There are many new students whom I have never taught and have only met a handful of times.

B4 Youth Theatre began in 2010 at an orphanage in Mt. Barclay, Montserrado County, Liberia, minutes beyond the Red-Light market known for its congestion as vendors, cars, people, motorbikes and animals spill over the thick rainy season mud and into the street. Here, all you need to do is wave from your vehicle and point or call for the items you would like to purchase as vendors showcase their wares. Red Light is a major transit center as well, and the cost of a seat in a taxi to the orphanage nears 150 Liberian dollars, more than twice the amount it was when I began this journey a decade ago as the exchange rate with the US dollar continues to climb. Unemployed, the youth in this study often could not afford to explore the hustle and bustle of Red Light. Their own environment was quieter, intentionally more secluded to keep them from negative

influences as the orphanage leaders kept them busy with schoolwork, chores, prayer meetings, choir rehearsals and all of the activities they deemed to be important for a proper Christian education.

That first year, 23 children and youth between the ages of 10-18 trained with me five days a week from 9am-4pm with a short break for lunch over an 8-week period. They had one week off from our regular schedule to celebrate the Independence Day holiday as I traveled with former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to witness a variety of development projects and programs in Nimba County, Liberia, the birthplace of the Organization of African Unity. Equipped with hand-written letters the children asked me to share with Her Excellency as invitation to their closing performance, I joined the convoy from Monrovia in a secured car. The streets cleared in expectation of this fast-paced entourage; we had passed through Red Light quicker than I thought possible. I called the students to tell them I would wave as we passed by momentarily and soon thereafter, the convoy slowed as Madam President's driver alerted everyone that we would do a short stop. The security professionals in my car told me I could get out to see what was going on and that they would collect me on the way out. I sprinted from the car passing 20 or so vehicles ahead of me to see a large gathering of my own students surrounding President Sirleaf. When they saw me, they hugged me and thanked me as they shared with excitement that they were able to shake her hand or introduce themselves, asking if I had given her their letters to which I replied that I had not yet had the opportunity. Then the convoy was off again. The drivers slowed for me to hop back into the car and we sped away re-entering at our designated place in the lineup. Another

call came through on the security radios asking that the girl who ran to see the children be transferred to Madam President's vehicle, and this was arranged at the next stop where I was able to share their letters, describe our program, and request her presence at their closing performance.

The INQUIRER, Tuesday, August 17, 2010 Page 3

Orphans Appeal To Ellen

The kids of the Children Rescue Center Orphanage Mission are appealing to the Liberian President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to come on August 17, 2010 and witness their performance at the Monrovia City Hall.

The performance entitled, "Problems to Solve" is a drama that the kids themselves wrote and starred in. The performance would bring dance and songs to the stage as the kids try to seek interventions from the country's various problems through their drama.

Photos of the Kids

Seventeen-year old Lilay who is a part of the drama, told the INQUIRER that the drama has taught him dancing, singing and how to speak publicly.

Little Evelyne said that the kids want the President to come to their performance so that she can see the improvement the kids have made backstage.

Jasmine Banks who helped show content her on the kids their

hidden talents said that the program will be held on August 17 at the Monrovia City Hall. No one will be admitted without an invitation and those requiring one invitation should contact her on 0646864.

Figure 1. Photo of article from the Inquirer newspaper in Liberia, author Garmonyou Wilson. Photo taken by author, August 17, 2010.

A month later, after much detailed preparation and planning, Madam President and her cabinet along with many children and constituents packed Monrovia City Hall, the largest and most elegant indoor performance venue in the country at that time. Their first play, "Problems to Solve", was written to urge the extension of free and compulsory education beyond grade seven, primarily as a way to keep girls safe from exploitation and abuse. Madam President congratulated them heartily at the end of their performance and pledged her continued support. When I returned the next year, the government had

extended free and compulsory education through grade nine, a move that was assisted by such a public display of demand for more educational opportunities.

Since this inaugural performance, B4 Youth Theatre has expanded to deliver free arts education programming to young people in five of Liberia's fifteen counties: Montserrado, Margibi, Bong, Nimba and Grand Bassa. This expansion followed B4 Youth Theatre's 2013 Playwrights Festival given to mark Liberia's Decade of Sustained Peace, when President Sirleaf remarked, "I'd just like to admonish you, the organizers, to continue to do this and hope the program will run in other parts of the country so that our children can once again learn through theatre acting[2]." Slowed in its expansion by the Ebola crisis in 2014-15, the theatre company has managed to reach more than 400 youth participants through its classes, accepting by audition nearly 100 of these youth as performers in annual national showcases. Drawing primarily in-school youth, boys predominate, though girls take on the majority of leadership positions, advancing through the trajectory of Junior and then Senior Arts Instructor levels, eventually mentoring others and running their own program sites. Despite this growth, the organization struggles, as theatre arts are not a prioritized activity for young people. The time required to excel creates a cost-burden for families who need their children to maintain the household, care for younger children, or earn money. Most of our families eat one meal a day which is representative of the way most people live in Liberia.

[2] President Sirleaf Joins Thousands of Cultural Jamboree Celebrants to Mark Liberia's Decade of Sustained Peace; Attends Children's Theatre Performance. Executive Mansion, Government of Liberia. Saturday, 17th August 2013. Retrieved January 6, 2021. https://www.emansion.gov.lr/2press.php?news_id=2692&related=7&pg=sp

The majority of participants in this study are from Bong County, the heart of Liberia, also part of the area considered the breadbasket- the heart of agricultural production. There is great pride in feeding others, especially visitors, as a part of a proper reception. Perhaps this is why some of the strongest tensions in my field work revolve around the processes surrounding food preparation, plating, and sharing. Food culture could be a study of its own that opens a world of information about gendered norms, intercultural dynamics, and expectations of organizations to feed their employees and participants. Some of these examples arise in chapters herein. Aside from food, the values around agriculture also shape the way the parents in this study view civic development and citizenship, "Wulu pa miayee a nelee ya golon gerii mai" or *you will know what you get by how it comes up* is a Kpelle phrase which invokes an emergent citizenship. Building from many scholars who have studied the multifaceted nature of personhood in Africa (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Neequaye, 2020; Cossa, 2020), citizenship as a construct involves not only particular civic skills and characteristics of the individual, but also includes the ways in which associational life and interactions develop and shape the citizen. As a child, when I wanted to do whatever it was that other kids found to be popular at the time, I recall my mother telling me that some children are permitted to grow up like a weed. I think her suggestion was that she was cultivating carefully the interactions and associations that would shape my personhood. The parents in this study express similar concerns about their children's involvement in society which reveal their fears of engagement in street life to include roaming or "walking about" and "following behind bad friends". In the theatre company, they found a refuge to contain their

children's curious ambitions, while still offering exposure to things they as adults had never even experienced.

Accessing local idioms to make sense of my findings, I foreground one parent's explanation that "you will know what you're getting by how it comes up" as theoretical fodder for scholarly consideration of societal expectations for youth citizenship development in connection to agricultural practices. The theory of change I propose posits that the reality of hunger and the necessity of growth condenses time between present and future such that the falseness of linear models of development are exposed; youth are not merely passive recipients and beneficiaries of international interventions but are key actors in the development process. Youth subvert the very systems and structures which distance their power as being for the future through everyday performances aimed at improving their quality of life in the present moment. Their praxis of theatre-making and performance draws into sharp focus the realities of liveness in which their performances become performative, creating new possibilities for solutions on issues they have reason to value. Thus performances, both staged and in the everyday, are social actions with others that pinpoint the means by which human development and international development coalesce around youths' "coming up," signaling their ability to claim space and a voice in decision-making on policies and practices impacting their well-being.

This performance ethnography considers how Liberian youth strategically use performance to navigate civic and political processes within a theatre program with a

mission of "empowering young people to become educated citizens through the arts"[3] in Liberia. According to health equity researcher Michael Marmot (2015), empowerment includes material, psychosocial and political means of having control over one's own life. Lack of control of one's destiny including present environmental factors leads to poorer health outcomes for those with lower social status and less control over pursuing the kind of life they have reason to value (Whitehead et al., 2016; Sen, 1999). This study utilizes a performance studies approach which focuses on gestures and speech acts and highlights the "multiplicity of responses and interpretations of theatre performances" which reveal "the relationship between performance and nationalism… and struggles for power between and among citizens and states" (Covington-Ward, 2015, p. 23) to investigate three inter-related questions:

1) How are young people leveraging cultural production to advocate for alternatives to policies and practices impacting their wellbeing as emerging citizens?
2) In what ways do the performing arts create possibilities for collective work towards a shared project, and how are artists' projects made possible or constrained by the development agendas of extra-governmental organizations?
3) How might the perspectives of youth be given greater authority through the use of performance ethnography as a civic praxis?

Methodologically, the explicit integration of youth participatory action research with performance ethnography acknowledges multidirectional flows of information, thereby challenging the inherent power dynamics of the researcher and researched relationship. As an educational experience in the Freirean sense, these methods become pedagogical when all are engaged in participatory learning which is at the heart of

[3] Organization's mission statement from their website http://www.b4youththeatre.org/about1/ Retrieved December 14, 2020.

democratic education. This study also has theoretical implications for the study of youth citizenship in Africa. Its findings yield insights for intentional, thoughtful, and consistent youth integration into health and education interventions, practices, and policies at every level. My dissertation offers the fields of education, Africana studies, and global health an explanatory ethnography of how youth in Liberia reorient understandings of citizenship relationally across difference to mobilize bottom-up action in the transformation of systems and structures which impact their quality of life and well-being. It also speaks to current trends in non-voting political participation such as protests taking place globally.

Historical and Political Considerations for Youth Citizenship Development in Liberia

Liberia was many things to many people from its inception. Despite being the earliest iteration of the modern nation-state in Africa, Liberia is frequently understudied in research investigating democracy and citizenship (Moran, 2013). It was the battleground for abolitionists' and emigrationists' debates. To slavers in the antebellum south such as Charles Mercer, it was a dumping ground for free Blacks who threatened the institution of American slavery. To northern white religious conservatives such as Robert Finley, it was the benevolent and moral high ground. Free black abolitionists such as Absalom Jones and Richard Allen described Liberia as a denial of the rights of blacks to the ground watered by their blood, sweat and tears. Liberia offered a chance for Russwurm and other colonists to stand on the ground of equality with all men. Black and white missionaries alike saw Liberia as fertile ground for the spread of Christianity and the

fulfillment of Psalm 68:31 “Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto God.” There were many ways to ground one’s gripes and hopes in the image of Liberia.

However, one thing the settlement grounds of the early colony did not offer were territorial borders. In 1822, the American Colonization Society began resettling free blacks to a stretch of land roughly the size of the state of Tennessee on the coast of West Africa. Early colonists continued to arrive and settled loosely along the coast throughout the early 19th century, expanding their coverage of the region through purchases of land from the indigenous populations and consolidations of state colonization societies. Liberia became independent from the American Colonization Society in 1847. Yet, there is no record of major expansion beyond the coastal settlements until 1857 when the Republic of Maryland was annexed by Liberia, creating border disputes with Britain and France (Holsoe, 1971). In fact, the earliest accounts of Black American exploration of the interior do not occur until 1858, and the border issues with France and Britain remained unresolved until US intervention in the 20th century with Britain enforcing that a legitimate claim to territory was not justification for maintaining borders but effective control of these territories was also necessary (Fairhead, et al., 2003). In the 1930s-40s under President Barclay, Liberia established effective occupation of the hinterland and began to enforce central government policies (Holsoe, 1971). Even upon Liberian independence, the young government exercised no control of indigenous territory within its claimed boundaries though several sources described indigenous-initiated battles. Most settlements were comprised of free northern black Americans, manumitted slaves from the south, recaptured Africans referred to as Congos, and interacted with indigenous

populations as neighbors or through commerce or missions. For this reason, it is difficult to say who could claim Liberian identity in the early colony and who could become Liberian. Nearly thirty years of history in Liberia is dominated by the narrative of the American Colonization Society which has shaped the world's perceptions of Liberia despite the fact that some of the earliest settlers were opposed to the goals of the organization.

The founding constitution did not grant citizenship to indigenous persons, only to the small portion of the population known as Americo-Liberians (Sawyer, 1992; Cassell, 1970). Establishment of government institutions was exclusive to "civilized" Christians educated in the Western tradition until 1847 when Liberia was declared an independent republic (Saillaint, 2016; Burrowes, 2012; Moses, 2010; Beyan, 2005). Americo-Liberians remained in control of a centralized government in the capital of Monrovia until the 1980 coup lead by Samuel K. Doe, a dictator who killed many (Ellis, 2006). This signaled the beginning of political instability, culminating in a fourteen-year-long civil war led by Charles Taylor in 1989, killing hundreds of thousands, and spurring out-migration and displacement (Utas, 2003, and Ellis, 2006). The 2003 Accra Peace Agreement ended the war, installing a transitional government backed militarily by UNMIL. However, subsequent migrations related to educational opportunities abroad, the desire to unite families separated during the war, and the more recent Ebola outbreak continue to shape conceptions of citizenship, rallying calls for the passing of legislation in support of dual-citizenship (Pailey, 2021).

In 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, of both Americo-Liberian and indigenous ancestry, became the first democratically-elected woman President in Africa. Despite this promising shift toward democratic governance, the lack of inclusion of indigenous persons in key roles and national symbols has yet to be rectified and is perhaps most viscerally reflected in the national seal which centers a ship and the text “The love of liberty brought us here”. The very name Liberia, which is based on the terms liberty and freedom, powerfully reflects the hopes of the early repatriated settlers. This, along with symbols such as a national flag that unabashedly mimics the US flag and practices such as singing the national anthem enact the banal nationalisms that invisibly socialize children into citizenship roles (Benei, 2015; Hess & Torney-Purta, 2005). Given Liberia’s unique history with colonialism and US imperialism, the development of political identities require that youth negotiate dual identifications with Liberia and the United States.

In modern history, schools have served as the primary site for developing future citizens. However, nearly 20 years since the end of the civil war, Liberia struggles to rebuild its education system. In the midst of mass education sector failure and the recent shift to privatization of Liberia's public schools (Hook, 2017), young people are left with limited institutional supports for their development as young citizens. Youth living in Liberia are not likely to remember the war but have lived much of their lives witnessing how international entities are influential within forms of governance and play a pivotal role in the provision of social services and the building of infrastructure (Collier, 2016). Further, a bifurcated understanding of citizenship has been produced through a long

period of colonial governance -- one that has reproduced a hierarchy of purportedly more 'civilized' and invested citizens embraced by the nation-state and of remote, backward and 'tribal' subjects who remain essentially unproductive vassals of the state (Mamdani, 1996; Pailey, 2010). Because much of the population lives outside of the country since the war, youth that remain in Liberia have spent their lives under the dual influence of a large scattered transnational Liberian community that challenges legal, spatially-differentiated definitions of citizenship (Pailey, 2016) and powerful international NGOs, many from the US, that maintain a pervasive presence in shaping day-to-day life within the country (MacLean, 2017).

This research contributes to understandings of how young people embody and perform citizenship within the nation-state despite complex and overlapping flows of ideas and resources that supersede the boundaries of the state. This study is unique in that it gives an account of youth in Liberia that is not directly focused on how the experience of war affects the development of political identifications (Honwana, 2011; Hoffman, 2011; Utas, 2005; Boyden & deBerry, 2004). Along with other parts of Africa, Liberia has a generation of young people that have never seen war but live with its economic repercussion as evidenced by weak government institutions and the lack of infrastructure (Abbink & VanKessel, 2005; Honwana, 2012; Sommers, 2010; Sommers, 2012). A focus on international aid alone does not address political root causes and therefore fails to solve structural problems in Africa (Ferguson, 1990). Thus, despite Liberia's unique past that sets it apart from the broader history of colonialism in Africa, today it faces a similar, if not worse, imperial predicament than other countries in the Global South where foreign

"experts" have more power to determine the contours of a society than do its members (Walker, Sriprakash, & Tikly, 2021; Tikly, 2017; Abramowitz, 2014). These tensions are at the crux of my investigations into the lives of young Liberians who are active in community life and development in the pursuit of a shared civic project (Ben-Porath, 2012).

The Unwieldy International Development Landscape

> During recent decades, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in development have increased their profiles at local, national, and international levels. NGOs have come to be recognized as important actors on the landscape of development… NGOs tend to be best known for undertaking one of these two main forms of activity: the delivery of basic services to people in need or organizing policy and advocacy and public campaigns for change. At the same time NGOs have become active in a wide range of other, more specialized roles, such as emergency response, democracy building, conflict resolution, human rights work, cultural preservation, environmental activism, policy analysis, research and information provision… While NGOs are increasingly ubiquitous, the challenge of understanding the phenomenon of NGOs remains a surprisingly tricky one. One reason for this is that NGOs are an extremely diverse group of organizations which makes meaningful generalization about them difficult. They take different shapes and forms, and play different roles, both within and across different country contexts. (Lewis, Kanji, & Themudo, 2020, introduction)

The variety, spread, and function of NGOs is furthered complicated as lines between state and civil society responsibilities are blurred. Anthropologist James Ferguson (2006) offers a theorization of the state-civil society binary which he refers to as vertical topographies of power. He argues that the perceived binary is troubled by trends towards transnational engagement by both, state and civil society. Despite these trends in transnational engagement at grassroots and state levels, the systems, structures, and relationships that give shape to the international development sector, increasing scholarly

attention focuses on the disparities, inequalities, and inequities between local and international or expatriate actors.

Martins (2020) argues that these differences show up in language, knowledge production, funding, and partnerships where international actors claim to fill a role of bringing equity to the subaltern while exacerbating global inequity through entrenched power imbalances. Meanwhile, African staff of NGOs are not passive victims of the system. In Angola, Peters (2019) demonstrates the practices of refusal enacted by employees who reject cooperation and co-optation within the neoliberal NGO sector marked by structural inequalities. However, exiting the system may cut short a variety of potential opportunities associated with one's connect to the NGO sector. In Ghana, Kumi & Kamruzzaman (2021) demonstrate a similar phenomenon where Ghanaian nationals are keenly aware of how their work is recuperated into the false premise that international experts have brought development. Ghanaian nationals are frequently not recognized for their contributions towards development in scholarly aid ethnography literature or oftentimes in practice on-the-ground. The situation is similar in the context of Liberia, where there has been a strong NGO sector across a range of formations and incorporations as the sector is characterized by consistent long-term engagement with expatriate development practitioners.

Medical anthropologist Sharon Abramowitz (2014) documents the possibilities and constraints made available to Liberian social workers through the NGO sector in post-conflict Liberia, such as a stable career path doing work they valued once they make it into the system. Yet some Liberian staff have faced gross income disparities compared

with their expatriate counterparts and also "were forced to submit to humiliating forms of supervision, micromanagement, and arbitrary rules of employment that could be ruthlessly enforced" (p. 219). Abramowitz demonstrates that the advancement of these NGOs' agendas relies on the labor of Liberian staff who serve "as cultural brokers who could bring NGOs and local populations into closer alignment; and as salesmen of NGO programmatic agendas." This intermediary role, which involves persuading and proving the relevance of NGO programs to local communities, is in many ways the neocolonial version of the African employees who took on roles as clerks who maintained colonial governance structures (Lawrance, Osborn, & Roberts, 2006; Ochonu, 2014: Austen, 2011; Derrick, 1983).

In the midst of these tensions between the presupposed global North and global South, both development professional and researcher positions and positionalities matter (Bilgen, Nasir, & Schoneberg, 2021; Pailey, 2020; Benton, 2016). These different functions between research and practice are undergirded by a particular value placed on knowledge from the global North largely structured by race. White (2020) urges reflexivity on the part of the researcher arguing that the politics of knowledge, even when produced in a form of collaboration or partnership, tends to be dominated by the global North reinscribing a deficit orientation of the global South partner's contributions to knowledge production. Daoust and Dyvik (2020) illuminate the harmful implications of epistemic violence in development caused when policies are enacted without first learning from local knowledge. Communities targeted by NGO interventions are forced into the position of teaching international development practitioners out of necessity

because they will bear the burden of poor outcomes if and when the so-called experts fail to actively learn where there are gaps in their interventions.

As global power inequities persist in the international development sector, so does the local knowledge that has made it possible for African people to survive and thrive through the oppression of colonialism and its afterlives. Navigating oppressive systems requires techniques of performance. In this ethnography, situated to lift the perspectives of youth artists engaged with the NGO sector through partnerships, I draw on Mats Utas's (2005) notion of 'victimcy' to describe how youth self-stage by taking on identifiers of victimhood strategically to navigate the power structures that impact how they live, work, and play today, as well as secure future benefits.

Theatre for Development (TfD) in Africa: Contextual Considerations

Situated in the anthropology of performance, this study is a performance ethnography of a youth-driven Theatre for Development (TfD) process. With a long history in Africa as a subfield of international development communications and jointly a subfield of applied theatre, theatre for development is process-oriented, structured by critical reflexivity on the relationship between a theatre practitioner and a particular community. TfD has endured harsh critiques as an imperialist tool driving forward the aims of international organizations or as a technology of social control in the development of African nation states which simultaneously absolves the government of responsibility placing the burden of social change in the hands of under-resourced communities (Abdullah, 2020; Okuto & Smith, 2017; Odhiambo Joseph, 2005). However, many scholars (Byam & Thiong'o, 1999; Chivandikwa, 2018; Smith, 2017;

Plastow, 2015) focus on recent shifts towards grassroots leadership in the theatre for development process. The people, and in the case of this study, the youth remain at the center of the theatre for development process in each phase: problem identification and the proposal of solutions, research on the impact of the problem and proposed solution to the local community, development of characters and action in a flexible sketch rather than a full and fixed script, performance, engagement with the audience post-performance, and follow-up evaluation (Nyoni, 2018; Kalipeni & Kalmongera, 1996)[4]. To this standard procedure, I also add the sharing of key findings or lessons learned which may also be done through performance thus continuing an iterative cycle of knowledge creation[5].

There are many points of resonance between theatre for development and various models of participatory action research. The earlier years of the theatre project fell more squarely under the rubric of participatory action research. However, as the youth have taken on more leadership, transitioning from students to instructors, my own role has shifted to helping them amplify their projects to new audiences rather than develop their projects. This shift has provided the ethnographic distance to study the youth theatre company's cultural production as an example of how the theatre for development process becomes locally embedded while interacting with international others.

This study explores the pedagogical and democratizing potential of participatory theatre as a multimodal form of research which opens space for reimagining equitable

[4] See Appendices B & C which detail some of the core elements of TfD and how B4 Youth Theatre's work during the Ebola crisis fits within these models.
[5] See Appendix A for the B4 Youth Theatre model of TfD.

public policies and practices (Dattatreyan, 2020; Dattatreyan, 2017; Gallagher et al., 2013). Participatory theatre affords greater accountability to participants, serves as a tangible product of reciprocity, and heightens reflexivity on the part of the researcher as embedded in systems of power with research participants. This methodological and pedagogical practice is attentive to iterative flows of information in the co-creation of knowledge. Whereas Jim Thomas (1993) asserts that critical ethnography gives more authority to participants' voices, in theatre participants raise their own voices for social change, asserting their own authority as experts of their lived experiences (Dennis, 2009).

These performances are a form of resistance. For Turner and Schechner (1988), in social dramas, actors engage in performative reflexivity making other "designs for living" possible (p. 24). Turner describes an "entelechy" of cultural performance by which performers realize their own potential through performance and how society's realized potential is made manifest on stage. Madison's (2006) concern pertaining to the dialogic performative is for the politics of the performative as a "generative and embodied reciprocity" which yields possibilities (p. 320). Madison (2011) discusses the necessity of being both reflective and reflexive- metacognition considering not just one's actions but the implications of interactions. Secondly, Madison (2006) challenges us to consider the dialogic performative as a "distinctive kind of performance" that resists conformity and births the imaginary. These experiences are embodied and require paying attention to the time and space contexts and the relational meanings developed through interactions in specific contexts. It is in extraordinary "now moments" where there is possible

transformation, and these moments occur out of tension with the Other[6] acting on the self (p. 323). Thus, youth performers are amplified as beings for the present, conceptually reorienting them as actors and change agents in the current moment whose power is not locked away in some undetermined time in the future.

Emanating from ten years of engagement at my field site, this dissertation focuses on one year beginning in October of 2018 - the first year of George Weah's presidency largely won by securing the youth vote. A pivotal time for the nation and youth in particular who were witnessing the first peaceful transition of power since 1944, this performance ethnography examines the process of creating popular theatre as it is draws from the lived experiences of participants while it aims to change the very systems and structures that shape their opportunities and capabilities[7]. I argue that this iterative process of engagement and training in popular theatre gives youth the tools they need to strategically craft everyday performances of citizenship. I offer a theory of change for how young people in Liberia transition from perceived beneficiaries to civic actors. An innovative public health education intervention, TfD thus has the potential to impact deliberation on accurate health information and its actionability across different contexts rather than, for example, the current divisiveness that characterizes public discourse on COVID-19 in the US.

[6] I use "Other" throughout to mark difference from the individual self, drawing from the work of D. Soyini Madison and Dwight Conquergood around ethical dialogical performance and performativity.
[7] I also engage many of B4 Youth Theatre's internal and public documents, especially pertaining to their work during the Ebola crisis which was referenced by participants frequently during the period of research.

I began B4 Youth Theatre in 2010 in response to a call for educators to assist in the post-conflict rebuilding of the education sector. The year prior, two of my graduate school peers, who were also Liberian government fellows, urged me to come establish an arts program in Liberia as there were no arts programs in the country. When I arrived after spending a year raising funds, doing research on the post-conflict environment, meeting with Liberians in the diaspora, and planning to pilot the model through an internship with a gender-focused local Liberian NGO, I quickly learned that unfortunately they were right. Not only were the opportunities for youth and children in the arts few and far between, but also those that did exist were unaffordable for the average family -- there was very little value placed on arts and recreational programs as most people were struggling to secure the basics for bare life. I lived with families that ate one meal a day in 2010 and for the majority of the country, this same degree of economic difficulty which results in limited access to food among other needs remains.

Because of these hardships, the theater company also remains and year after year scrapes together donations, in-kind support, and pro-bono services to carry out 8-10 weeks of free high-quality arts education and social justice programming in 5 of Liberia's 15 counties- Bong, Margibi, Nimba, Grand Bassa, and Montserrado. In addition to teaching the children and youth performance skills which build their confidence, train them to speak publicly, and enhance their reading and writing abilities, this is one of the main spaces youth in this study have to connect with their friends and experience the joy of being in an artistic community. After all, theatre is for those who love it and delight in its energies. For many of the youth, it is a welcomed break from the mundane and

physically demanding tasks of everyday life in a low-tech environment. They know that when they come to the theater company, they will learn about things in a format that is very different from what they experience in school. Both young people and school leaders in the areas that have been touched by the program value this energy and in 2015, the 8–10-week Vacation School for the Arts was expanded year-round through the introduction of school clubs under the National Director Paul. The school club are all led by current program participants and offer flexibility meeting during the school day on breaks or after school and performing at local private and community events such as birthdays and major dates of recognition and remembrance.

In 2012, the US nonprofit became incorporated with the goal of providing support to the program in Liberia and offering cultural arts education program in the Maryland, USA region. In 2014, B4 Youth Theatre became a Liberian local NGO functioning with the support of international and local donors and a local Board of Directors. I officially assumed a role on the Board in Liberia as the Liberia National Director was named, and I maintained the role of Executive Director for the US nonprofit. As a smaller, local NGO, B4 Youth Theatre has been able to take on a number of large projects by sheer might and will of its dedicated youth actors and their families. This has made it possible for the youth to perform their own original work on issues that they identify as being important rather than having their voices and art recuperated into the agendas of larger NGOs. On projects such as the Ebola-Free Liberia campaign, where the youth were early to create public awareness, the partnership with a larger NGO (specifically a multilateral organization) serves as an example of a partnership where there was potential for mutual

benefit. Over the years, B4 Youth Theatre has primarily performed its own work though on occasion has taken on a shared project as an implementing partner, tasked with carrying out elements of communication for development as part of a larger strategy to address an issue where communication between the international community and the local communities are only one crucial element. Though in this case, the youth actors serve an intermediary role as this term is used in public health literature on social marketing, it differs from the intermediary role of local African clerks in colonial Africa. The embodied performances of message dissemination in this context elicit audience responses that challenge, extend, and appreciate these efforts, thereby providing a mechanism for iterative feedback to powerful decision-makers who are able to alter official best practices making them actionable in local communities.

However, TfD methods are not always met with great reception. Josephus, a Junior Arts Instructor with the theatre company asked me to meet with his parents one evening after rehearsal was over. He had recently finished high school, and his family needed him to work so pressured him to leave the theatre company. I was hoping that they would reconsider having him participate. A striking stage actor, he had played a lead role as a traditional healer in a performance that was seen by hundreds in person and viewed online by more than 9,000 people. People across Liberia and the diaspora knew his performance, and it brought him joy to participate. Josephus had asked me to come speak with them after meeting with me a few days before. He shared with me that they had never seen him perform. I burned a copy of the live streamed performance onto a DVD and asked if he would be able to find a way to show them. He said he would figure

it out even though their home had no electricity. So, this evening of my visit to his parents, as the National Director Paul led me through the darkness of the tree-covered footpath, I was hoping that they might have seen it and changed their minds.

My heart ached every time I saw Josephus on the road, waiting outside of the Lone Star phone company office in the hot sun with about five or so other young men for the chance that a customer might stop by needing to purchase phone credit. He was so cheerful, always asking about how rehearsals were going and what his friends were doing. I could tell he missed the theatre. When Paul and I arrived at their house, the father and mother were sitting outside on a bench situated against the back of the house next to the traditional outdoor kitchen. My eyes took a while to adjust by aid of the starlight and one small candle to see the details around me. A cat and a dog or two lounged near the low fire, as several children who I had not met before busied themselves clearing dishes and straightening the kitchen. Both parents greeted Paul who quickly left to allow us time to talk, and they offered me a smaller wooden bench that we might face each other instead of sitting side-by-side. Though it was not terribly late, it was dark - too dark to see much of anyone's facial expression as we talked. Three generations of their family were present, and all came out to greet me including Josephus' two-year-old nephew who was there with his own parents. After having met everyone and learning of his father's views on the war and development, his mother asked me what B4 will do to help their children with school. I told her that B4 does not pay for school fees, that there is no money. I also told her how much was spent in a year to cover instructor pay, transportation, communication, lodging for travel, guest instructors, and expenses related

to their performances. I talked in detail about the budget for the upcoming show so that she understood, and mentioned that B4 is primarily a community-based organization. She said she understood and that it is good for the children to learn because that is their benefit, but that the parents have difficulty putting the children through school. When I told her that we have volunteers who are abroad and some people who help with fundraising but that the structure of the organization is not really an international NGO but a local one, she seemed to understand better.

She said that she too was involved in similar efforts of dramatizing awareness with the Development Education Network Liberia (DEN-L) which has existed since 2000 using the theatre workshop method and forum theatre to help women's groups and communities make decisions about their lives. I told her that it was no surprise that her son would be so active in B4. She explained that she did not make it to see the screening last week of their play inspired by the Liberian novella *Murder in the Cassava Patch* because she always fell asleep trying to watch shows at night. I told her that when the students did the actual performance in Gbarnga, very few people came to support, and she suggested that the location was not conducive to having the parents attend offering that her church would be a better location.

Josephus's father recommended that if we wanted the organization to be sustainable, it would be necessary to open our own compound and have trainings there, making Bong County the center of operations for the program like DEN-L did. They were also located in Bong County and had shifted their model to become sustainable since post-conflict development activities were not necessary then in the same way they

were in the years immediately following the civil war. He said that once the current instructors go to other areas, the children in that area would become discouraged, but if they had a physical place they could go to for training, it would be better for them. I told him that we had thought about this and gone back and forth about whether it would be good to have our own building. I highlighted a few key areas that I had discussed with Paul, other staff and the Board in the past: 1) most of our students came from the schools that we partnered with for the use of their space when the school day was not in session, 2) it would be difficult to make any place financially sustainable for upkeep as there were already structures in Gbarnga that serve the purposes a space conducive to our activities could serve such as recording studios, auditoriums and other spaces with the potential to generate income and offset costs, and 3) a facility that would enhance our teaching would be expensive as it would need to include a specially-constructed floor for dance or an auditorium built for live dramatic performance with structural considerations for acoustics and the ability to use a variety of lighting effects. No place like this existed in Liberia, and it would be extremely expensive to build as the materials would all need to be imported and the building expertise was not here either. I told them that we always need ideas for how to improve the program, and welcomed them to join the Parent Advisory Committee to share their ideas and concerns especially as their younger children (and grandchildren) are becoming of age to participate in the program.

Repositioning myself toward the dim light of the candle to face his mother, I asked her to talk with Paul if she wanted to chaperone the upcoming performance in Monrovia because the parents who could make a difference in how the community

thought about B4 were the parents who remained involved in seeing what the children could actually do. She explained that for their family, they knew that it was important to have the children active in learning things but that other parents did not understand why there was no immediate financial benefit to the children. I told l her that I didn't know how to change this myself, but that it would be good to have parents who value the program able to give some input and speak with others about why their children are involved. I told her that there was only one other program in Liberia that taught the things we taught, and that classes met once weekly and they charged $60 United States Dollars (USD) for a month on top of performance and costume fees at the end of a session. I echoed what I had often heard Paul say about maybe having the children pay for B4 if it would help change the mindset around the value of what they are learning, which met with no response from Josephus's parents. This is a family that ate one meal a day. Paying for this kind of program is not an option. Allowing their children to participate instead of work is a luxury.

Conceptual Framing

African Youth Cultural Production and Knowledge Production

Roots and routes of 'youth'

This study is concerned with how and what young people in Liberia learn and practice in the theatre-making and performance processes that impacts their quality of life, both today and as they aspire for the future. Often characterized as precarious due to lack of employment, failure of education systems, violent conflict, and traditional gerontocratic practices around social status and rights, young people in Liberia leverage the socially

constructed category of youth as a political classification to make rights-based claims. Though I acknowledge the sociological, biological and psychosocial contributions to the scholarship on youth and age classifications, I primarily draw on literature from the anthropology of youth to understand how young people struggle to place themselves strategically in the midst of a globalizing world. My specific focus is on youth cultural practices as a means of understanding the present circumstances of young people and their aspirations. Borrowing from the term 'roots and routes' coined by Paul Gilroy (1993) in *The Black Atlantic* to distinguish between two conceptualizations of African diaspora identification, I use this term metaphorically to delineate the local and global contributions to the construction of the youth category in Africa. Earlier anthropological accounts identify systems of age classification that are rooted in specific contexts and processes while more recent scholarship seeks a universal, biological and psychosocially based understanding of adolescence and youth. However, it is in the anthropology of youth that these are reconciled by the acknowledgement that even seemingly universal transitions in age are imbued by context-specific meanings and power dynamics. Youth, as a category in Liberia, is doubly constructed, *rooted* in local traditions, customs, and expectations for social and behavioral norms while at the same time being *routed* through international humanitarian discourses to claim rights and the benefits of citizenship as a political category. Through various conjectures such as advancing educationally, becoming a parent, securing employment, and marriage, young people are able to transition from youth to adults (Johnson-Hanks, 2002). However, none of these alone necessitate this transition. It is primarily the stability and multiplicity of such conjectures

that solidifies transition to adulthood. Therefore, in a context marked by instability, young people in Liberia often remain in-between and rely on the politicization of the youth category well-beyond the period of biological adolescence to seek redress for the denial of economic, educational, and other opportunities that facilitate one's transition to adulthood.

This study centers school age young people including those who have entered the university level based on the premise that citizenship education has largely been studied in the context of schooling. The age group that I focus on is 10-25, with a greater focus on those who have not yet completed high school and are considered to still be enjoying their childhood which may increase the likelihood that their participation in arts based experiences (music, dance, drama, etc) would be permitted. Many of the young people in this study experience major life conjectures across the age range. The community in which this study takes place has a large number of girls under the age of 15 who are mothers. Due to financial constraints, some youth do not begin any form of schooling until they are well along in their teen years. Most young people in this community experience some form of educational interruption due to the inability to pay school fees. Finally, the expectation to earn money begins at a very young age; in some cases, once children have learned to walk, they may regularly accompany older siblings or parents to sell goods preparing them to take up a market on their own before they ever step foot into a classroom. In sum, a ten-year-old may be have the responsibility of selling goods to contribute to their household income while a 25 year old may be completing high school. Anthropologist Alcinda Honwana (2012) encourages scholars and policy makers to

consider not just the forces that circumscribe young people's lives, but the ways in which their experiences charting new paths through religion, music, sports and technology have shaped the economic and political environment. This project offers an exemplar of how Liberian youth occupy space as both, individual artists and organizers who skillfully engage audiences on contentious issues of public concern.

Youth Cultural Formation

In Argenti's (2008) account of youth dance performance as a response of state violence, he demonstrates that the continuities in modernist performances transform memories of oppression by reappropriating armed forces movement vocabulary and material culture. He thereby situates his study's youth performance group's relation to the state "in the context of a long-established dialectical material culture of performance and power which not only links [Cameroon] Grassfields kingdoms with changing external influences, but also enables them to negotiate those influences" (p. 754). He argues for the centrality of mimesis in the ability of young people to raise their voices on current forms of state oppression as a continuity of historical violence enacted against youth who were targets of slavery and forced labor. In the context of my research in Liberia, youth performances are in dialectical engagement with forms of state violence which reinforce their marginalization even in times of peace. By linking their own cause to the humanitarian aims of external influencers, they advance their access to public goods such as education and health, goods they understand as constituting their citizenship.

Though youth performances in this study are performative, working on policies and practices within the conceptual boundaries of the modern nation-state, they also

contemporaneously connect ideologies and interests across ethnic, regional, and international boundaries. Diouf and Fredericks (2014) resist "simplistic dualisms between rural and urban and local and global to foreground explorations of urban margins, mobilities, and alternative imaginings of space that emerge in everyday life for their insight into the constitution of sociopolitical communities" (p. 10) which is not limited to state governance but includes "worlding from below" (p. 12) such as in the instance of religious communities which span urban and peri urban localities while also connecting to global networks (Also see Ferguson, 2006; Fadlalla, 2019).

Human Development and Humanitarianism

Cole and Durham (2007) extend the capability of young people to shape their world by conceiving of the future as being created by children and youth across three dimensions:

> (1) how the future is imagined through specific representations of temporality,
> (2) how one orients oneself and others to it through sentiments like hope or anxiety and their relationship to risk, and
> (3) how one substantively creates it by designing and normalizing new kinds of practices... youth practices—by which we mean the actions undertaken both by young people and by people and institutions concerning youth—are fraught with risk and uncertainty and are... on the cusp of success and failure" (p. 11-12).

This research seeks an understanding of development which is characterized not by interventions but interactions as processes of "economic exclusion, unmediated commercialization, wrong-headed state policies, and so-called development schemes… do not enhance interaction, cooperation or wellbeing, but rather the reverse" for youth across the gerontocratic divide (Abbink, 2005, p. 12). In the practice of citizenship as a civic praxis, the youth in this study elaborate a conceptual framework for development

through their performances which examine and reimagine actions taken between youth and institutions that serve youth. Drawing from the United Nation Development Programme's human development index, "a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living,"[8] greatly shaped by the capability approached pioneered by Amartya Sen and developed for applied use by Martha Nussbaum, I am interested in what youth have real opportunities to be and do that they have reason to value. This study is concerned with the ways in which arts participation may enhance or foreclose positive human development. The performances of youth artists in this ethnography illuminate what Bay and Donham (2007) describe as the causal links between politics, youth, and memory in "states of violence":

> *"Violence may not be inevitable, but its occurrence is not unrelated to inequalities of education and to inequalities of opportunity for the educated. The continuing failures of African states to widen forms of distribution of state wealth, and their inability to encourage institutional changes that would create wealth rather than simply exploit it, suggests that violence will remain a too-common response to local frustrations. Africans, young and old, need to be able to imagine a future that will be at least as good as the past of their parents"* (p. 15).

Violence, in this sense, exceeds the threat to bodily integrity or bare life, and includes the myriad ways through which young people's lives are made marginal even in times of peace. Youth definitions of violence and health are at the crux of my investigations into the drivers of youth social and civic actions aimed to better their quality of life. Youth perspectives and expectations are shaped by not only their own experiences but how they learn about the stories of their parents. The ability to assist one's family is central to

[8] UNDP HDI. http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi Retrieved January 6, 2021.

quality of life. For parents who prioritize their children's education as their primary hope for a better future, the exposure to regional, national and cultural history, building connections to their past by gaining knowledge that their parents may not even be aware of contributes to the desire of parents to have their children involved in the theatre company. Many parents shared that they benefit when their children come home to share information that they themselves never had access to. Alternatively, when educational options are cut short through adverse policies and practices, both youth and their families experience violence that impacts their sense of control over their lives in the present and real opportunities to shape their futures.

Liberian youth's understandings of democratic citizenship and belonging are complicated by multiple versions of history and varied contemporary discourses on the role of civil society (Quaynor, 2015). Gable (2000) draws on Appiah's (1991) concept of neo-traditionalism and finds that the way in which youth imagine history rather than accept history as fact is essential to understanding the civic nature of cultural production as continuity instead of rupture. With no official historical narrative, Liberian youth are left to imagine the historical negotiations between and among tribes and the "state" as itself an international "other" fraught with tensions due to colonialism under the rule of Americo-Liberians (Nevin, 2011; Burrowes, 2012; Pailey, 2020).

Inequalities in education, in particular, lead youth to particular political pathways as Strong (2017) observes in the "aspirational politics" of Nigerian college students. Acknowledging the limitations of schooling to guarantee a stable livelihood after graduation, students build social and political capital during their time of schooling to

pave the way to political futures. Community-based organizations have steadily filled gaps in times of educational rupture (Baldridge, 2020). Similarly, this theatre company also offers opportunities to build social and political capital, as a community-based organization which fills a crucial role for youth who have experienced years of educational interruption due to the civil war's devastating effects on the education sector followed by Ebola and the current pandemic. The ways this organization has adapted over these tumultuous years yields tremendous insights for how community-based organizations, and in turn, educational institutions may adapt to serve youth in times of crisis as well as in times of peace (Baldridge, 2020; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Stambach, 2013).

Young people are also shut out of political decision-making due to poverty. As unemployed or underemployed young adults, they are socially delegated back to youth status and, as a direct consequence, denied full adult rights, again resulting in low social status and limited access to resources and political decision making (Honwana & deBoeck, 2005). Even NGOs which aim to alleviate youth poverty through a variety of interventions (both entrepreneurial and direct-service) can become problematic when they fail to include youth or rely on fear-induced narratives as a basis for support. In situating Africa's youth challenges in a broader developmental trajectory historically and globally, Resnick & Thurlow (2015) find that the "alarmist perspectives related to youth instability, apathy, and lack of agency find little support" (p. 14). Assumed opportunities such as the access to technology or other goods that would provide youth with direct

engagement in activities which may not be available in their immediate context may in reality not be opportunities that they are capable of using.

For example, one of our youth theatre artists refused to accept a high-end smartphone for video production though she said she wanted to learn the skills of video-making and be an active participant in a virtual arts collaborative. Upon further investigation, the administrative staff found that she did not have electricity in her home and would not be able to charge the device unless she took it to a charging station where there was a risk of theft. Internal procedures such as signing a waiver for borrowing the technology and accepting responsibility for its care made this opportunity moot. However, youth who are better situated to accept more of the same risks might value this kind of opportunity as an investment in future economic benefit. Similarly, Bolten (2012) documents how in the disarmament process in Sierra Leone, youth fighters were trained and given building and repair tools intended to support their entrepreneurial endeavors that they ended up selling instead to make quick cash because though they had a skill set, the distrustful social environment was not conducive to them being hired to work for private businesses or homes.

These examples demonstrate that often, policy recommendations advanced by the international community (international organizations and donor institutions) are "based on a rather mechanistic understanding of youth preferences and behaviors" which might benefit from a better integration of African youth into contemporary global concerns (Resnick & Thurlow, 2015, p. 15; also see Gough, Langevang & Owusu, 2013). Policies on youth in Africa often focus on their economic activities, supporting efforts which

build a skill set to utilize in the local, and even global, marketplace often to the exclusion of education. The study of youth cultural production in Africa provides a lens by which we can think about the economic impact, even as "twilight activities" (see Eguavoen, 2010) alongside of the social impact on the environment in which young people aspire to be heard, seen and accepted rather than marginalized. For these reasons, this ethnography focuses on specific arts processes that nurture youth's "capabilities"- their actual opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value.[9]

Artistic and cultural production provides young people a wider platform to amplify their preferences and behaviors, especially those with implications for policy and practice. Efforts to incorporate young people into global discourses on policies which impact their lives often embed an underlying assumption that children are innocent and vulnerable resulting in their perspectives not being taken as seriously as those of adults. Cultural forms, and particularly performance-based methods, allow youth to present and frame their own ideas about their society. Fadlalla (2019) flags the 1990s as time of American NGOs use of narratives of rescue and care for the suffering as a liberation strategy in Africa. However, this was also the time of expanding structural adjustment policies across Africa and much of the global South. These are repeat moves in the international community of sending in the missionaries before the extra-governmental colonizers.[10] Liberia was in the midst of its own civil war in the 1990s which by the time

[99] The Capabilities Approach was pioneered by economist-philosopher Amartya Sen and has been used to document and describe human development metrics in international development policy. See: Robeyns, I. (2005). The capability approach: a theoretical survey. Journal of human development, 6(1), 93-117.
[10] Manji, F., & O'Coill, C. (2002). The missionary position: NGOs and development in Africa. International Affairs, 78(3), 567-584. Fisher, M. M. (1922). Lott Cary, the Colonizing Missionary. The Journal of Negro

it abated, there was little left but the harsh reality of a need for the rule of law.[11] Human rights discourses which may or may not have included an ethic of rescue and care were in full force.[12]

This ethnography details several instances in which youth actors determined to set forth on a mission of sharing educational messages with the broader public as part of their "responsibility" as citizens[13], which follows a trend of ambassadorship that is used to set individuals apart for their ability to influence their communities. Anthropologist Amal Fadlalla describes this phenomenon of performed influential capabilities as "routing visibilities" which produces the hyper-visibility, branding subaltern human rights and humanitarianism actors as role models (Fadlalla, 2019). Considering the great contributions youth civic actors make to state and extra-governmental goals and aims, it is expedient to have an account of how these emerging global citizens tease apart humanitarian and human rights discourses from the international community in terms of its applicability to the local context and their own lives.

Global Citizenship Education

History, 7(4), 380-418. Korieh, C. J., & Njoku, R. C. (2007). Missions, states, and European expansion in Africa. Routledge.

[11] Blair, R. (2018). International intervention and the rule of law after civil war: Evidence from Liberia. Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs Research Paper, (2018-39). Lubkemann, S., Isser, D., & Chapman, P. (2011). Neither state nor custom–just naked power: the consequences of ideals-oriented rule of law policy-making in Liberia. The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law, 43(63), 73-109. Cheng, C. S., & Zaum, D. (2012). Selling the peace? Corruption and post-conflict peacebuilding. In Corruption and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding (pp. 19-44). Routledge.

[12] Abramowitz, S., & Moran, M. H. (2012). International Human Rights, Gender-Based Violence, and Local Discourses of Abuse in Postconflict Liberia: A Problem of" Culture"?. *African Studies Review*, 119-146.

[13] Interview, July 11, 2019.

Most often, global citizenship education centers the experiences of young people in the Global North who have the mobility to travel, attend conferences, and sit in classrooms with access to information and ideas that are curated from other parts of the world. Moreover, the notion of a global citizen often signals a cosmopolitan, well-traveled individual who has experience in surface culture such as enjoying foods from different parts of the world and having some multilingual ability (Ong, 2009; Silova & Hobson, 2014). However, scholars are recently turning their attention to issues-based understandings of global citizenship education such as identity-based political models serving the interests of women or particular religious and social groups, thereby highlighting the kinds of knowledge and skills that are necessary to create a sustainable world (Bamber et al., 2018; deAndreotti, 2014; Parmenter, 2011). Youth in Africa, and other parts of the Global South, are bombarded with global discourses that have a direct impact on their everyday lives. They often do not have the luxury of dismissing major world events and issues of global concern as something that has or may have little significance to their lives, as global pressures from climate change to economy failures often have immediate and dire impacts on day-to-day survival. Some say when America sneezes, the world catches a cold, but in economies impacted by the policies and politics, cultural shifts and economic crises of other nations, it also matters if China or Australia or any of the European powers sneeze; countries in the Global South may catch a cold. Godfrey and Cherng (2016) have shown how in the United States, youth from communities facing greater income inequality are more civically engaged. Likewise, as those who are most marginalized by global social and economic stratification in

education, youth in the Global South are perhaps also the most equipped to identify how, where and why systems and structures fail to meet their needs and offer sustainable solutions to the problems in international education (Campano & Damico, 2007; Moya, 2002).

I understand global citizenship as an embodied practice that requires engagement beyond surface culture. Education researcher Viv Caruana (2014) asserts that mobility is an all-too-common focus of global citizenship education and cosmopolitanism and refocuses on pedagogical practices that draw on students' lived experience in developing their intercultural understanding, inter-connectedness, and acknowledgement that learning and personal journeys are "co-dependent, mutually-reinforcing and continuous" (p. 102). She demonstrates how resilience is built through challenges with cultural dis-location and offers a re-conceptualization of global citizenship education that does not privilege mobility, but which focuses on student storytelling as pedagogical practice which embraces diversity, belonging, community and solidarity as a pathway to global citizenship education. This decoupling of mobility from cosmopolitanism in global citizenship education creates space to consider the lives and perspectives of youth from Africa who are often characterized by a lack of mobility (Hansen 2014; Honwana & deBoeck, 2005; Strong, 2017). The role of cosmopolitanism in global citizenship is analyzed as an aspect of capital by sociologists Igarashi and Saito (2014). They differentiate between the consumption of culture as objectified cosmopolitanism and an openness to foreign others as embodied cosmopolitanism which can be acquired through habitus. They explain that critical sociologists of cosmopolitanism highlight the ways in

which the objectified state yields global stratifications, particularly through education institutions that have the power to determine and credentialize certain forms of cosmopolitanism. Finally, they identify mechanisms which facilitate cosmopolitanism including increased global flows of people and the spread of human rights which centers humanity rather than nationality. As is described by Caruana and clarified by Igarashi and Saito, embodied cosmopolitanism focuses on embracing difference rather than on mobility and taste which are often dependent upon economic stratification, in this case national difference, and the practice of interacting and sharing across difference as an important part of global citizenship education. I use these concepts of 'coming up' and 'embodied cosmopolitanism' to demonstrate how young artists in Liberia embody a cultural openness in their ability to navigate their relations with international organizations and local organizations with international funding support, which present both problems and solutions to the ills facing their societies.

Thirty years after the genesis of transnational and international humanitarian interventions across Africa, young people in Liberia possess an awareness of the other as always political. They have been politically socialized to navigate national and international structures, systems, and interactions in ways that lift possibilities for their forward trajectories while attempting to avoid the pitfalls of complete reliance on either. Nation-state governance lacks capacity and the international community's support is governed by 3–5-year funding cycles. Neither is to be fully trusted in obtaining the well-being and aspirational futures promised to children and youth by the incorporation of human rights discourses into policies (such as the Liberia National Children's Law of

2011) and countless iNGO interventions. Beyond a legal framing of rights-based discourses, Liberia's Children's Law features the responsibilities of children to family and community as a matter of culture and tradition.[14]

Chapter Overview

I travel with youth in Liberia as they engage a collaborative process of popular theatre to bring awareness to and change the systems and structures that shape their opportunities through three data chapters. I begin with a composite sketch of how the organization operates within its context from the view of the National Director, parents and students drawing from interviews and organization documentation during and after the Ebola epidemic of 2014-15 entitled "From Beneficiaries to Civic actors: Building a theory of change for theatre artist educators in health emergencies." Far-reaching awareness campaigns have become a hallmark of the programming offered through the theatre company, and their early entrée into this arena is often referenced throughout the period of ethnographic research (2018-2019) to describe their understandings of civic responsibility. I rely on organizational internal and public records to set the context for their engagements with the international community. This chapter demonstrates how youth move with and across centripetal pulls engaging both margins and center as targets for NGO interventions. I consider the ways in which NGO programs offer quickly consumed tangible benefits as a trade-off for the time and performance of vulnerability

[14] AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE CHILDREN'S LAW OF LIBERIA, 2011. http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/c9a0bff7ffbe595d2c02ffb5ca03cdb60a16833d.pdf Retrieved January 7, 2021.

and lack. These benefits become expected as the key gain from any international intervention, and thus discipline and condition communities in Liberia, and youth in particular, to become beneficiaries. As youth are *interventioned* through these transactions, I detail the perspectives of youth, parents, and staff of the theater company of how they understand what it means to benefit from the theater company program, and the tensions surrounding whiteness (as it shows up in nationality) in internationally supported programs. Through this, I introduce a theory of change for youth political socialization through public health campaigns. This chapter demonstrates how the strategic categorization of "youth" identity politics presents as "a core argument for accessing civil and economic liberties" (Fadlalla, p. 16) operationalizing youth capabilities through humanitarian branding and social marketing. I find that how Liberian youth utilize techniques of performance on and off-stage demonstrates that through theatre, youth become capable of influencing decision-makers to transform systems and structures that impact their quality of life and well-being.

The second chapter focuses on micro-level citizenship development through cultural production aimed at policy change such as live staged performances, script-writing, and the art of teaching performances specific to gender based violence and inequality. "Pedagogies of Gendering Citizenship: The role of drama in developing positive masculinities in Liberian Youth Theatre" troubles binary opposition in the gendering of citizenship and demonstrates how performance may be used as a pedagogical praxis which shifts citizen relations from identity-based ideals of belonging to project-oriented views of citizenship. The work of theater uniquely enlivens new

structures of feeling that may be associated with kinship through the building of ensemble which occurs through play- games that build camaraderie, trust, and bonds that may be considered familial. Drawing on traditional conceptualizations of powerful African mothers, this chapter conceives of *embodied citizenship* as derived from one's role, responsibilities, and commitment to extended kinship networks which reshapes power relationally between genders. I study the ways in which performance is used to demonstrate learning about the Other, both on stage and in the everyday. Daily interactions with foreign others and among peers yield info about power relations. The ways in which interpersonal interactions are intentionally performed to achieve a particular outcome are at the heart of understanding how youth use embodied practices to strategically navigate everyday life.

Finally, "Public Performance as Global Citizenship Education: You will know what you're getting by how it comes up" reorients conceptualizations of global citizenship by connecting the staged and street performances of the youth civic actors to their everyday performances with international decision-makers and across the gerontocratic divide within their communities. The youth in this study direct their own theatre-making process where the actions and implications of interactions, everyday and staged performance, are performative. This is seen in the ways that the youth reorient power across the gerontocratic divide. One parent explained in an interview[15] that the theatre program helps students learn about citizenship by structuring how youth are "coming up" as something that is performed. In the broader theatre community, parents

[15] Parent interview, July 28, 2019, 8:20am GMT

and elders described multiple kinds of citizenship performances- interaction with friends, musical and speech acts, and boldness speaking in front of a crowd. “Coming up” derives from indigenous theorizations of germination in the Kpelle language (re)thinking human development through the practice of agriculture. It is a local way to describe the performative; it has to do with performances with others which in turn do something to create social change. This ethnographic account follows youth visual and performance artists as they grapple with the possibilities and constraints of staging local performances on establishing a war crimes court to understand how they are crafting an identity as global citizens. I juxtapose a standard workshop model of internationally supported advocacy efforts involving visual artists in Liberia against a typical rehearsal planning meeting of a local youth theatre nongovernmental organization with international funding to consider how the youth artists navigate their interactions with international others in identifying and narrating problems and solutions to injustice in their society. Through participant observation and direct engagement with their negotiations between international discourses/organizations and local discourses/organizations, I analyze how they are strategic in avoiding being exploited by either and finding agency in both as an instance of how global citizenship education is actualized in informal international education contexts in the Global South. I argue that these strategic navigations are illuminated in everyday performances which build upon the concept of embodied cosmopolitanism as a form of global citizenship education. Despite a tension between the cosmopolitan citizen and African conceptualizations of collective personhood, the empirical realities of the other (international) and the self (local) necessitate that youth

who value aspects of both perform new ways of conceiving of citizenship. I refer to these astute performances as strategic navigations of the systems and structures that work to circumscribe their lives differently from their own collective imagining. These strategic navigations are calculated, induced by the persistent narrative of African crisis that keeps international development as an industry afloat. Therefore, through the treatment of the ethnographic material in a manner that is seemingly discordant across varied "crises," I focus on major themes that emerged constantly throughout the period of data collection, and indeed that surfaced earlier in my practical work which drove the questions underlying this project. In each scenario, the young people (and oftentimes their parents and other involved adults such as the organization staff) utilized the tools, resources, and information made available by international actors in the service of their own aims, goals, and aspirations. These strategic navigations are at their core interactional, borrowing cultural material to earn trust and gain leverage for increased opportunity.

CHAPTER 2. Theorizing Methods: Conceptual Foundations from the Anthropology of Performance

"The very notion of possibility rests with those who can imagine other ways that the smallest thing and the largest thing are or can be; we need the imaginary to envision the world and ourselves differently." – D. Soyini Madison, 2006

"Conventional ethnography describes what is; critical ethnography asks what could be."
- Jim Thomas, 1993

Centering a youth theatre company and arts education institution I established in 2010 in Liberia, this performance ethnography draws from a year of in-depth field work, in addition to media documentation, internal reports, meeting notes, and my own experiences as an international nonprofit leader within this organization over the past ten years. This performance-based approach to research is undergirded by collaboration with research participants as co-witnessing, as a result of which the researcher is very present in the ethnographic account (Madison, 2006). The researcher role is fluid, and some ethnographic material is written almost as staging for performance; there is great detail around the physical position of actors in the space which yields insights pertaining to power and risks that are specific to the context and research interlocutors that would likely be missed in sole use of participant. By highlighting specific instances of how young people in Liberia constantly negotiate their performances of citizenship in a context saturated with international expertise and intervention, including their engagements with me as both director and researcher, I extend a vision of global citizenship education in the field of international education that interrogates the informal

education practices[16] of youth community theatre performers which I refer to here as *civic actors.* Through this notion of *civic actors,* I bring together their stage-based performances with their action-oriented work on social and political issues behind the scenes, recognizing that these performances occur both in their everyday interactions among themselves and with international others. I demonstrate how they leverage their artistic practices to insert their voices into public discourses with local and international social and political actors. I investigate the ways in which young artists' visions for their society are made possible and constrained by the agendas of international organizations in Liberia and what this means for how they perceive their own ability to take on roles as civic actors—citizens who take action off of the stage in everyday life- in local, national and international matters of concern.

This performance ethnography focuses on the ways in which youth cultural production mediates political socialization between and among Liberian youth, their families, society, and the world. I use critical ethnography informed by performance studies, which in many ways is co-authored with my fellow theatre artists. Performance ethnography centers multivocality to amplify the voices of my co-investigators on the policies and practices that most directly impact their lives and futures while simultaneously advancing an interdisciplinary academic agenda that engages with the fields of education and global public health.

[16] Baldridge, B. J., Beck, N., Medina, J. C., & Reeves, M. A. (2017). Toward a new understanding of community-based education: The role of community-based educational spaces in disrupting inequality for minoritized youth. *Review of Research in Education*, *41*(1), 381-402.

Committed to knowledge production which flows from cultural production, I analyze movement following Aimee Cox (2015) who danced her way into understanding the complexities of her Black girl students' lives. Here, she is attentive to the ways in which embodied markers of identity and power are present and impact the relations between bodies in the constitution of citizenship. In this sense, analysis of a dance performance such as those in Cox's work necessarily intra-acts with statistical data on the home lives of the young women in her study whose dancing spills over through and across the structures and policies of the homeless shelter she studies as another body of data. Interpreting data on the lives of these women and girls without an analysis of their performances misses critical points of interconnection. Processes which occur beyond the body do not only signify but act as a performative 'doing in matter'... the data assemblage must include the physical body in all of its cultural inventions (Dixon-Roman, 2016, p. 485). There is no beyond the body without bodies. There is no citizenship without the cultural inventions entailed in the making of the citizen.

Recognizing the critical role of performance in furthering cultural understanding, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones (2002) urges multivocality in performance ethnography. In creating a sensory experience of her fieldwork, Jones invited local members of the Yoruba community in the United States where she shares her research to participate as characters. In one scene, a woman joins into the dance spontaneously challenging the accuracy of the performers and the audience's perception of authenticity. The accuracy of these cultural representations delineates who belongs and can be accepted as a cultural citizen. In my own work, my research interlocutors and co-performers express their

acceptance of me within the community of predominantly Kpelle people in Liberia explaining, in the words of the theatre company's National Director, "She has made herself one of us."[17] Similarly, E. Patrick Johnson foregrounds co-authorship to challenge the inherent power dynamic in the researcher/researched relationship,

> "Rather than fix my informants as static objects, naively claim ideological innocence, or engage in the false positivist "me/them" binary, I foreground my co-authorship, as it were of the ethnographic text produced... for I was integral to the performance / text making process as were my informants" (Johnson, 2003, p. 10).

Dwight Conquergood (1989) uses *poetics, play, process*, and *power* as keywords that define the contours of the performative turn in anthropology whereby the ethnographic method comes to be viewed reflexively as a performance in itself (p. 82). In performance ethnography, the ethical researcher is very present in the data and its presentation. Though Conquergood asserts a shift from mimesis to kinesis, I argue that drawing on Michael Taussig's (1993) reflections on mimesis and alterity, that it is indeed mimesis *within* alterity that enlivens the possibility for emergence[18]. Play, in particular in the space of rehearsals, troubles the supposed binary between self and Other; the act of copying through difference produces new knowledge and new possibilities of belonging as a kinetic functioning, embodied and performative. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones characterizes performance ethnography as a form of culture exchange or "how culture is done in the body" (Jones, 2002, p. 7). She explains that performance ethnography is a method that builds on two ideas:

[17] Field notes June 2019.

[18] Also see Brown, A. M. (2017). *Emergent strategy*.

> 1) that identity and daily interactions are a series of conscious and unconscious choices improvised within culturally and socially specific guidelines, and 2) that people learn through participation. If people are genuinely interested in understanding culture, they must put aspects of that culture on and into their bodies" (Jones, 2002, p. 7).

This praxis of mimesis within alterity forms the basis by which I analyzed the multiple performances always occurring on stage and in everyday interactions throughout the research process.

Conquergood further highlights the slipperiness of ethnographic research in these situations where the ethnographer adds yet another layer of power through textual representation. Here, I find John Jackson's notion of "thin description" helpful as it encapsulates a kind of anthropology which leans into the specificity of the moment as experienced by the researcher. Thin description is experienced from the view of the anthropologist *with* interlocutors, a "flat ethnography"- what was said/done/heard and how it was perceived from the anthropologist's perspective (Jackson, 2013, p. 16-17). For Jackson, the "thin" allows for a certain precision which animates the collective imagination or vision- the power of redefining and naming the creating of particular knowledge and ways of knowing. Though Jackson references the frame of a camera as the conduit for his production of the thin, my research presupposes the body as a conduit in the anthropology of the thin. A central figure in Jackson's (2005) *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity,* Bill is characterized as being a very vocal critic of many things in the Black Harlem community including Jackson's own life choice to pursue higher education which Bill considered as a waste of time. Bill did not hesitate to inform Jackson that he was "lost" and ought to be doing other things with his life to build the

community. Bill and Jackson challenge us to pinpoint what is real about Blackness as it exists across difference, and where its imitations and representations in cultural production are frequently contested on the grounds of authenticity. Jackson's Blackness is characterized by a sincerity which will not be confined or restrained but, like Conquergood's ruminations on *process* elides with "metaphors of motion and sound… forces that resist closure" (Conquergood, 1989, p. 83). The thin opens and animates the subjectivity of the research encounter as an interaction which yields new knowledge. Jackson captured such encounters through the camera; I do so with my body.

In a very different context, Paulla Ebron (2009) describes her entrance to her field site with a description of how the traditional jali (griot) would address Ebron's research assistant instead of her during interviews. She explained that in time she came to understand that this performance was teaching her that in her exalted position as a foreign researcher, she was expected to have someone speak for her as a sign of status. Both of these encounters caused the researchers to be reflexive about their own positionality and gave them a deeper knowledge about themselves as part of the research environment. As Jackson posits that sincerity is the excess of authenticity, so the thin is the excess of the thick- the material that exceeds anthropological structures and frames, interiority's theory. Self-representation and reflexivity in the ethnographic account allow for more honesty, acknowledging the presentness of the researcher and the ways in which, in the case of this ethnography, everyday performances between myself and the youth artists shape the structure of the theatre company and its connection to other institutions.

Goffman's (1949) work encouraged reflexivity within daily interactions as individuals perform particular roles and ways of being in social life. His understanding of everyday life has been considered a dramaturgical analysis approach within sociology. Scholars have taken Goffman's challenge to consider the ways in which everyday acts and self-presentation contribute to our understanding of performance in theatre arts and ritual (Carlson & Bial, 2004; Turner & Schechner, 1988; Schechner & Schuman, 1976; Jackson, 2004; Pavis, 2003; Grimes, 2014; Ross, 2009; Drew, 2001; Covington-Ward, 2013; Scheiffelin, 1998; Landy, 1996). Other scholars have focused on performances of gender and identity in everyday life which I revisit in Chapter 2 Pedagogies of Gendering Citizenship: The role of drama in developing positive masculinities in Liberian Youth Theatre (Berry 2000; Covington-Ward, 2013; Senelick, 1992; Kesby, 2005).

Several anthropological accounts have considered the contributions of Goffman's work to ethnographic methods (Turner & Schechner, 1988; Carlson, 2013; Conquergood, 1991; Denzin, 2018; Covington-Ward, 2015). Turner first suggested the anthropology of performance as a sub-discipline which includes the study of performance as culture often in non-Western, non-elite contexts and also the study of culture as performance as a paradigm. It is through performance, and their analysis of social dramas in particular, that process is seen as acting on structure. "Structure is always ancillary to, dependent on, secreted from process. And performances, particularly dramatic performances, are the manifestations par excellence of human social process" (Turner & Schechner, 1988, p. 84). Performance shapes structures. This ethnographic account of youth theatre artists evidences how youth rights and responsibilities are impacted through both staged and

everyday performances of citizenship, gender, and holding status as one who bears knowledge.

E. Patrick Johnson (2003), performance studies scholar, examines the multiple performances that occur in the teaching of literature performance:

> For those of us who teach performance of literature, the performances that occur in our classrooms are multiple: pedagogy as performance, learning as performance, texts as performance, critique as performance, and so on... the shift to ‘‘performance studies,’’ that is, the view of performance as process, contingent, historically and culturally situated, itself a text-making praxis” (p. 220).

He asserts that meaning-making is developed through “a dialogical relationship among texts, students, teachers, the self, and the self as Other” (p. 221). In this expanded conceptualization of “text” which includes all involved in the dialogical relationship, Johnson insists that “the focus is on the meaning-making process rather than on unearthing a fixed underlying meaning” (p. 223). Here, “text” is not circumscribed by the page and confined to the mechanisms of the written word. Text is processual and performed, occurring in and through relationship with others and the context or environment in which these relationships are situated. Learning and teaching are thereby performances through which knowledge is created.

The staged and everyday performances highlighted in this dissertation reflect my personal, professional, and scholarly commitments to amplifying the voices of those less heard in sites of decision-making power. Anthropologist and performance studies scholar, D. Soyini Madison (2010) expressed similar commitments during her field work in Ghana where she studied the controversial practice of trokosi. Here, her goals included,

> "(a) to assist local activists by inspiring more of an awareness among Ghanaians of human rights advocacy within their own indigenous context; (b) disentangle and clarify the pertinent issues of the debate, as well as illuminate the connections between the global economy, poverty, and human rights abuses in the global South; and (c) moreover, it would support the efforts of local activists in their struggles for social change and for public policy initiatives relative to women and children's rights" p. 2.

As political changes constrain citizen participation in the political process and deepen societal inequities with devastating effects for Black people globally, I analyze the ways Liberian youth develop their civic capabilities through participation in the performing arts.

In this ethnographic account, I understand performance as a liminal space between reality and possibility where performances provide a rupture to everyday interactions and make transformation possible. The young artists in my study have much in common with the young women dancers in Aimee Cox's *Shapeshifters*. As with Madison's notion of the dialogic performative, the young women performers in Cox's study create a tension that causes others to recognize their own roles in creating poor perceptions that yield harmful treatment of Black women facing poverty rather than recognizing their potential and working with them to create possibilities. Following Turner & Schechner (1988), these social performances possess a certain entelechy that demonstrates other "designs for living" (p. 24). This dialogical demonstrative power of performance holds the audience accountable as the research bears witness to the hardships, risks, and dangers shared by the community (Madison, 2007). Gallagher, Mealey, & Jacobson's (2018) work on drama research with youth extends the idea that dramatic performance should challenge dominant societal norms and not merely

document them. In this way, performances are performative - they actively function in society, rather than simply present restorations of a nonevent (Schechner, 2010).

The anthropology of performance engages in critical ethnography which can be distinguished in part by an emphasis on meaning-making as political. Differentiating between traditional ethnography and critical ethnography, Thomas (1993) describes 'domestication' as tamed research that aligns with dominant ideologies rather than questioning symbolic processes and structures which shape day to day life. Such a process, he describes, gives into a certain kind of "wildness" that has potential to unleash multiple meanings. He argues that ethnography not only asks how but also what are the alternatives moving forward. He describes critical ethnography as that which "offers a more direct style of thinking about the relationships among knowledge, society, and political action" (Thomas, 1993, preface). Thomas's assertions about the possibilities of ethnography highlight the importance of pushing against ideological boundaries to allow for the production of multiple meanings. Performance, as a research method, allows us to ask, "What could be?" This is a question that the researcher asks with her interlocutors as the answer seeks to add authority to the voices of those whose are less heard.

Escaping Thomas's terms "domestication" and "wildness" which reify the power imbalance of dominant ideologies, it is perhaps more fruitful to consider Conquergood's (1985) framework for ethically situating the researcher's performances in the ethnographic process through moral dialogical mapping. Here, the relationship of the researcher to the researched is characterized by four major problematic performative stances (marked by selfishness, superficiality, sensationalism, and cynicism) which are

cut through by two sets of binary ethnographic tensions along a continuum – identity/difference and detachment/commitment. He presents a dynamic moral center which he coins as dialogical performance that "transcends and reconciles the spin-off extremes" of the four problematic performative stances:

> This performative stance struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another. The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing. Dialogical understanding does not end with empathy. There is always enough appreciation for difference so that the text can interrogate, rather than dissolve into, the performer… the dialogical stance is situated in the space *between* competing ideologies. It brings self and other together even while it holds them apart. It is more like a hyphen than a period. Conquergood, 1985, p.9

This ethical framework primarily attends to the presentation and performance of research as a form of knowledge dissemination. It hones in on the ethical considerations the researcher should take when sharing information about a culture to others.

Extending Conquergood's ethical framework, Madison (2010) employs the term "response-ability" asserting that in bearing witness to injustice as an outsider to a particular culture, the researcher who witnesses does not only have the responsibility to take action but to open possibilities for others to take action in response to what was experienced in the field and presented through performance. "The major work of performance ethnography is to make performances that do the labor of advocacy, to do it ethically to inspire realms of reflection and responsibility" (p. 12). Madison has staged portions of her field work for audiences about human rights issues such as potentially harmful traditional practices impacting girls in Ghana and labor movements in the United

States (Aubrey Fisher lecture, 2010). These performances become ethical when the ethnographer is doubly reflexive, representing herself in the performance as a way of being accountable for biases, vulnerabilities, and blind spots.

Dialogical performative is then an ethical stance which does not account for the researcher who studies a community or a people with whom they share identity. As a Black American woman doing research in Africa, I have to be attentive to the ways in which my research, as a reflexive ethnographic praxis, should first and foremost excavate my own miseducation about self and other as I have been trained in a colonial system which was never designed to liberate people living in or who are descended from the place we call Africa. Conquergood's dialogical performative presents an ethical framework that challenges the researcher to find a 'sweet spot' between identity and difference that is not a reality for my work. As I engage in the lives and knowledge systems of my interlocutors on the continent, the ethical response is to understand myself differently than how I've been taught to see myself in an imperial system structured around white supremacy. There is no 'superficiality' in my desire to be located, affirmed in African spaces, especially Liberia which is arguably the earliest site of Black American liberation. Rather, this becomes a process of identity re-making which rejects centuries of lies about humanity and Africa (Blain, 2018; Wynter, 2003; Walker, 1991).

In fact, to focus more intentionally on my 'difference' from my interlocutors would undermine the 200-year historical project of liberation and diasporic meaning-making that characterizes Liberia. One main reason the first Black American settlers in Liberia left the present-day United States is because there was a deep sense that Black

people would never truly be free by staying. With the current prison industrial complex and cradle to prison pipeline, were they so wrong? The ethical ethnographic performance stance for researchers of the diaspora studying people in Africa is to study with people in Africa, expanding our notions of personhood beyond our individuated selves to embrace indigenous collective understandings of unified personhood. Our individual well-being, our individual existence is not possible; there is only us. These fundamental theorizations of humanity underlie the major problems plaguing our world today- from violence to climate change- there is a lack of understanding humanity as simply 'us' rather than self and other.

D. Soyini Madison, a student of Conquergood, extended his work on the dialogical performative by challenging ethnographers to perform with "response-ability" as a central tenet of this ethical stance. For Madison, also a Black woman who has done research in Africa, response-ability is about advocacy and ethics where the researcher's ethical response is to take action and urge their audiences to do the same by giving her audience the ability to respond. She explains, "I bear witness and in bearing witness I do not have the singular response-ability for what I witness but the responsibility of invoking a response-ability in others to what was seen, heard, learned, felt, and done in the field and through performance" (2010, p. 10-11). Madison and Conquergood equip their audiences with this ability to respond through engaging at the intersection of ethics and performance. Both perform the stories of their research interlocutors for audiences of 'others' which are marked by their difference. As a counter to this distance which risks falling into trappings of 'cynicism' or 'sensationalism' as Conquergood describes, Omi

Osun Joni Jones (2002) draws audiences into critical engagement by intentionally inviting those who shared identity with her research interlocutors to the performance space in which she shares her ethnographic research creating the ability to offer an embodied critique through movement and improvisation. However, even this does not overcome the politics of representation, as the African continent is expansive and even a country as small as Liberia has great ethnic variation that surfaces in movement and gesture, impacting on meaning-making in performance spaces.

E. Patrick Johnson (2012), by way of D. Soyini Madison and in collaborative praxis with his research interlocutors, in order to address differential power in representation and to honor the risk that is essential in telling a story without a superficiality that essentializes, performs his own story from within the complexity of his shared identity as a gay Black man from the South (United States). His story with others is not presented as an autoethnography of the self but as an ethnography of the collective, an ethnography of the 'us' central to his project. My own project extends his work of co-performative witnessing through an ethnography of my own story as a Black youth artist, in shared identity with Black youth artists from Liberia. Our collective interactions with the predominantly white international community lay the foundations of this ethnography. I diverge from this scholarly canon in that I do not perform the stories of my research interlocutors, but devise with them, co-creating the discursive material of our performances, which they embody on stage.

Indeed, I argue that it is because I consider myself to be "of the culture" in shared identity and commitment that I am able to enter into genuine conversation differently

than someone who could not engage in border-thinking across insider and outsider positionalities. Conquergood asserts that this combination of identity and commitment leads to what he has coined, "Enthusiast's Infatuation." And as I sit with this uncomfortable indictment of my way of being in the field, rejecting notions of ethnographic distance, I am reminded of Sheila Walker's 1991 article in *Transforming Anthropology* where she speaks of her own commitment to Afrocentrism (also see Strong, 2020). As she unapologetically answers her critics regarding her scholarly engagement with Afrocentrism, I too answer that I do so "because I like it" (Walker, 1991, p. 23).

When and Where I Enter (Positionality)

I invoke this subtitle to channel the energies of Black women scholars who have set a path for investigating questions that have everything to do with how they perform in the field. Following Paulla Ebron (2009) who extends African American feminist Anna Julia Cooper's work, I enter this research with the awareness that like my interlocutors in Liberia, I too perform my multiple identities as researcher, teacher, and director, and that these positions are structured by my race, gender, and nationality. Even in my role as a researcher, my interlocutors constantly draw me back into a remembrance of their expectations for the organization to provide certain benefits and that these expectations are a direct reflection of their perceptions of my identity primarily as an American foreigner (sometimes also considered as a "white" woman) who is able to provide economic benefits. Ebron faced similar challenges that her role as a researcher could not completely buffer against. In her discussion of European women traveling to the Gambia,

regardless of race, the assumptions of their sexual promiscuity being tied to potential mobility for Gambian men to travel to Europe was a perception that she also encountered as a traveling woman. It did not matter that she was a Black woman or researcher as her gender and internationality communicated a specific kind of power which she also described as having the ability to feminize the Gambian man. My own gender and nationality have presented constant challenges while in the field as I have worked through ways to perform them strategically, both on stage and in everyday life. Throughout this dissertation, I consider the sneaky ways that whiteness is mapped onto national identity resulting in complex navigations around pan-Africanist conceptions of belonging and relational expectations which arise at the intersections of sharing racialized cultural identity while wielding a US passport.

The earliest experience I can remember of experiencing the complications of nationality and race as a Black woman research in Liberia is when I started working with a new group of students in the interior of Liberia. They could not understand me, nor I them, but we wanted desperately to communicate with each other. The children among the students immediately began to imitate my speech patterns and particular sounds that stood out to them in the way I speak English- they exaggerated a nasal tone with lots of "r" sound sometimes producing sentences that I heard more clearly, other times producing bursts of laughter from their friends for speaking "series" or American English. I, in turn, began to "hear" what they were saying, borrowing from common phrases and "trying on" this new way of speaking the English language. After a while, conversation was easy. I thought I had a decent grasp of Liberian English or at least

"simple" English. When I returned to the US and visited my church with a large Liberian population, I was welcomed into conversations with the women who were from Liberia, and the aspects of culture through language that I had put "into" my body came pouring out. I got glances of acceptance and could hold my own in the conversation, but as we were about to depart, I overheard one young girl tell her mother that I did not sound like a Liberian. That's when it hit me that I was internalizing culture that was modified to meet my needs as an outsider, and what the students in Liberia were learning from me was also modified. Together, we had created a hybrid form of communication through our multiple performances of each other's culture. Though it served our purposes in the classroom, it would serve neither of our purpose fully when in the presence of people from either culture.

This revelation informs my analysis of the ethnographic material in that I am keen to the particularities of how I perform for my research collaborators, how they perform for me, and how we together perform for various audiences. Our mutual everyday performances for each other receive as much attention as the youth's staged performances for live audiences because in our everyday performances, especially in interviews where the youth are informed that the research will be shared, their audience includes all of those to whom I am connected. Thus, some sections are written in the format of a script as you, the reader, become an audience we are aware of even outside of the space and time in which the research performances occur. Further, this revelation caused me to

rethink notions of self and other, and other within the self.[19] In chapter 3, youth artist and Senior Arts Instructor Serena will explain the value of these connections with implications for how I am situated within the research.

Though not an initial area of my own scholarly inquiry, gender and the gendered nature of international work have competed for center stage with my original questions upon entering the field. In 2018, as I continued to carve out space for myself as a researcher in a community where I had for long served as a theatre practitioner and educator, Liberia and its attendant international community were rocked with the tragic events surrounding the More Than Me academy. American Katie Meyler who had gained many accolades for "saving" Liberian girls from prostitution by giving them an education was outed for failure to hold accountable an ex-lover serving as principal, who had molested and raped many of the girls at the school, several of whom have since been diagnosed with HIV. This is not a new story. It may spark remembrance of international coverage of a similar tragedy at Oprah Winfrey's school in South Africa. Anthropologist Amal Fadlalla (2019) asserts that the humanitarian narrative of rescue, care, and compassion further works to highlight the vulnerable feminization of Africans and of African states. These examples of public scrutiny are evidence that African citizens are

[19] In Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon (2008) cautions that language is one way that the thinking of the oppressor takes root in the oppressed. "To speak a language is to appropriate its world and culture" (p. 21). He posits that racism is embedded in language imperialism (undergirding nationalism), yet hybridity is a form of resistance buoying the project of Black liberation. Reading hybridity as resistance offers light for the path in understanding Liberia's complex history of diaspora-making within its borders; tensions which surface through bodily engagement with power differences throughout this ethnography. I also draw upon Thiong'o, Ngugi W. (2005), Europhone or African Memory: The Challenge of the Pan-Africanist Intellectual in the Era of Globalization. *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*, 155 - 164.

calling for greater accountability from international organizations. Thus, the individuals who lead these organizations face greater scrutiny than many local organizations that endure similarity crises. I am reflexive about how my own actions may be conceived of as dappling in "white" saviorism as a gatekeeper[20] of material resources and tremendous social capital. This particular concern may uniquely be made visible in Liberia which has a nearly 200-year history of Black American socioeconomic and political hierarchy.

I entered my work in Liberia as an arts educator with a Master's in Public Policy in my mid-20s ,and rather than be presented with business opportunities perhaps in the field of international development or in minerals trade like many of my white female or male counterparts of any race or ethnic background, I was instead presented with marriage proposals as a proper match would secure both my physical safety as I moved about the country and my social status. Though by age, I was very much considered a youth in the African context, my gender, education, and nationality which was equated with relative financial stability made me old and suspicious to some. When looking for a taxi, men twice my age would ask me, "Big sister, can you help your small brother (with money)"? A friend barely five years younger than me asked one of my visitors to wait as I prepared for church; I overheard her explain that I was not yet ready because she was "ironing [her] white woman's clothes". Others asked why I didn't have children or a husband implying that I should not be traveling alone and that if I had a husband, I would have had to get his permission.

[20]Clay, K. L., & Turner III, D. C. (2021). "Maybe You Should Try It This Way Instead": Youth Activism Amid Managerialist Subterfuge. American Educational Research Journal, 0002831221993476.

Nearly a decade later, much of this has changed. Community members seem more at ease having met my husband who has traveled with me on several occasions, my pregnancy and subsequently nursing a newborn during fieldwork became points of connection with parents of the young people who are centered in this study. Having an affiliation with the University of Pennsylvania as a Ph.D. candidate has given me more access to circles of foreign-educated Liberian men who attended elite universities though very few advanced to the doctoral level. Similarly, the predominantly white expatriate community of international development experts increasingly sees the value in my grassroots experiences that are accentuated by my scholarly expertise. The promise of the Ph.D. from an Ivy League institution makes me valuable enough to be heard in circles where many only hold a bachelor's degree and have spent a fraction of the time that I have on the continent being deeply embedded in their communities of so-called beneficiaries. Due to these experiences, I can relate to the young people who are part of my study and report feeling shut-out of spaces and conversations that impact their own life trajectories. I do not see the youth in this research study as mere beneficiaries of any intervention I have been a part of through theatre. Rather, they are co-performers of community-based theatre and have become co-investigators of the research questions in this study that we have shaped together over the past decade. And like Anna Julia Cooper who keenly understood and articulated the complexity of intersectionality with her famous quote,

> "Only the BLACK WOMAN can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me"[21]

I too bring my research interlocutors with me when and where I enter through opportunities to perform, facilitate, and co-investigate.

Fieldwork tensions and paradoxes

My research in Liberia is full of tensions and paradoxes. During my fieldwork, I was faced with my own lack of mobility to move about safely between my research site in Gbarnga and the capital city of Monrovia where most centralized resources are accessed. It is even more difficult to maneuver in the area where my research site is located because of the transportation system. Gbarnga transportation is dominated by motorbikes. This is the main mode of transportation in lieu of a more familiar taxi system such as what can be found in Monrovia and many other cities all over the world. Many parts of Gbarnga are extremely rural with unpaved roads so motorbikes are far more efficient than cars. However, at five months pregnant, a motorbike accident posed a lot more risk than it has for me in the past. For example, during field work I had taken a motorbike to visit a residence I was considering renting and when the bike was about to park, it began to roll backwards down a small hill. I fell off and had to go to the ER at the local government women's clinic. Thankfully, everything important was fine and I only had a few scrapes and bruises. These are the regular life choices of women in the area

[21] Documented in The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper (VAJC), Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan (eds.), Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998.

where I do research. If they are to live active and full lives, they can walk for 40+ minutes in the heat, which is also not ideal, or take risks with the transportation system.

This was a tension for me because most international researchers would find these options appalling and simply rent a vehicle and hire a driver for the duration of their research. Though I could have explored this option, it would have been extremely expensive even for me as an outside researcher. It is not at all an option for the women who live and work in this area. I did not want to be the researcher who comes in with plenty of money to maintain the kind of life I would have at home and do research in communities where I am not taking the time to deeply explore the lived experiences of the people who are there. Since my earliest visits to Liberia, I have learned much from living among people in the way that they live- living within the midst of these tensions. Through these tensions, I am constantly stretched physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually to adjust my own ways of thinking and being. Oftentimes, I find myself relying on the people who know best how to cope and even thrive in these circumstances. When I fell off of the motorbike, a woman near my own age helped me clean my wounds and have a seat while I waited for the bleeding to stop. She brought me the materials she would use for herself in the same situation.

About an hour later, when I arrived at the home of one of my students, her mother who was studying nursing at the nearby university cleaned my wounds again, this time using gauze to remove some of the dirt and sediment that was under the skin. She encouraged me to go to the local clinic and consoled me that they could do a non-invasive ultrasound and had a good reputation for women's care in Liberia. She told me

that their services were even free of charge and that it is only medications from the pharmacy that incur a fee. I received immediate and quality care when I arrived at the clinic's emergency room. I have never had less than a two hour wait at an ER in the US. Here, I waited for maybe 15 minutes before I was seen. (Memo, October 2018). These are things I did not know as an outside researcher because so much of the data and information about the country's medical system focuses on its deficits. It is the truth that Liberia's medical and health system are lacking, but there is another truth about the quality of care that is superior to what I have received in other parts of the world.

Through these tensions, I have gained a more nuanced understanding of the health environment in Liberia as well as some of the potential harms caused by misperceptions of researchers who do not employ an asset-based framework to the communities they study. Had I stayed in my area of comfort and not taken the motorbike, or not sought local advice for care, I would have missed valuable learning about my research site and the health assets available in that community. Thus, my research is attentive to the ways in which learning occurs through and beyond the body. Anthropologist Aimee Cox explores the tension in remaining both in and beyond the body at the intersections of gender and nationality. She describes the way in which dancers get 'beyond the body' as a phrase used to invite the dancer's laser-sharp focus of the eyes, extension of the limbs as though reaching to something the eye can't see but knows is there, the contraction of the torso, the position of the head as demonstrative of the ways in which the social, political, economic and physical environment act on particular bodies, and the affective ways in

which differences in positional citizenship urges some bodies to stretch and expand while others are pressed to shrink.

Methods

This study takes place between September 2018-August 2019 in Liberia where programs central to this study are implemented and in the United States where the theatre company's records are held, though member checks extend well into 2020. I also reviewed selected items from the internal and public records of the organization over a ten-year period, particularly in the case of their Ebola awareness work which was referenced frequently in interviews, focus groups and observations throughout the study. My data collection and analyses processes occurred in three phases.

Phase 1: Backstage: Monrovia and Gbarnga, Liberia

I engaged in participant observation of three-monthly rehearsals of B4 Youth Theatre for approximately 30 total hours with field notes and attended staff meetings where I also produced field notes. I attended and audio recorded parent meetings for B4YT with field notes. These meetings transition between speaking Kpelle and English with translation so it was helpful to record in addition to taking notes. I shadowed three youth actors - a newer student, one Jr Arts Instructor, one Sr Arts Instructor - including visits at home, school, religious and other regular and special activities with memos written immediately after. I recorded and photographed events when it was appropriate and produced copies of these documents with students and families which was especially appreciated for events such as graduations. During this time, I also attended various arts and cultural events, public gatherings on pertinent social issues, gatherings for diaspora Liberians in

Liberia, and meetings with potential donors and funding organizations. Finally, during this phase I collected information about youth organizations, registered and unregistered, in Bong County where B4YT headquarters is located. I found that many of these youth organizations are invested in life skills development and livelihood strategies but lack funding mechanisms. Through shadowing youth in B4YT, I gained a better sense of the everyday social determinants of health that impact their wellbeing: nutrition, physical workload, transportation, access to medication, living arrangements, inconsistent school schedules, and relationships/sexuality, among others. Some of these concerns overlap with the themes of their original plays. I also had the opportunity to investigate the intersection of grassroots-iNGO supported advocacy and arts methods through a consultancy which allowed me to explore how other organizations utilize the arts and choose advocacy issues on a spectrum between rising community concerns, national policies and international agreements. In phase 1, I collected and/or produced field notes from three rehearsals, distinct memos for a variety of purposes[22]: field work memos from each event as I shadowed the youth, vignette memos from chance encounters in the field[23], research design memos when what occurred in practice departed from my original plan, researcher identity/positionality memos from various settings, B4YT organization reflexivity memos, community-based organization (CBO) and nongovernmental organization (NGO) documentation in a condensed spreadsheet with relevant

[22] Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2019). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.
[23] Faier, L., & Rofel, L. (2014). Ethnographies of encounter. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *43*, 363-377.

information, video, photo and audio recordings. I also produced focus group transcripts and audio with a broader range of advocacy organizations focused on a variety of issues from gender justice to land rights and county development funds.

Phase 2: Director's Notes United States

I conducted a document review of B4YT cultural products including written and recorded plays, music, youth journal entries, rehearsal recordings, reports, media, and event programs to identify major social determinants of health (SDH) themes in plays recorded by video and scripts written since 2010. I analyzed these efforts through multiple readings, first by considering scale (local, national, global) and conceptually (political pertaining directly to democratic representation, policies, and rights or civic related to citizen-driven and implemented change). I gave considerable attention to their work during 2014-2015 on the Ebola awareness campaign as Phase 1 observations demonstrated this as a reference point for iNGO partnership activities youth consider to be valuable and impactful. Analyzing these documents allowed me to identify points of connection or tension between embodied aspects of performance, what youth bodies can **do** and **be**, drawing from Sen's capability approach[24], and the social determinants of health which illuminate how youth personhood and capabilities are shaped by their environment and systems. Through the analytical strategy of multiple readings[25], I asked: *How do the everyday experiences witnessed in Phase 1 shape what cultural products*

[24] Sen, A. (1993). Capability and well-being73. *The quality of life*, *30*, 270-293. Sen, A. (1990). Development as capability expansion. The community development reader, 41-58. Sen, A. (2004). Capabilities, lists, and public reason: continuing the conversation. Feminist economics, 10(3), 77-80.

[25] Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2019). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

youth produce? Also, how do dominant discourses such as national policies and international agreements impact youth perceptions of the social determinants of health and thus shape their advocacy efforts? How might the accessibility of funding for certain issues impact youth advocacy efforts?

In this document review of B4YT and other advocacy organizations' processes, I identified mechanisms for dissemination and implementation of ideas/information related to the social determinants of health in annual reports, relevant internal and external communications including social media and newsletters, monthly reports, awareness effort work plans, lesson plans, student journals and workbooks. I organized these processes into logic models drawing from social marketing[26] and humanitarian branding[27] frameworks and theories which account for power dynamics and social hierarchies in public health. I identified points of connection or tension between youth civic practice, especially as illuminated through the Public Achievement model[28] (a public work version of youth participatory action research), and broader conceptual considerations around citizenship and politics as it pertains to transnationalism and diaspora. In synthesizing these processes, I asked: *What mechanisms exist for youth advocacy from local development of shared beliefs and values to national policy change? How has B4YT*

[26] French, J., Blair-Stevens, C., McVey, D., & Merritt, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Social marketing and public health: Theory and practice*. Oxford University Press. Grier, S., & Bryant, C. A. (2005). Social marketing in public health. *Annu. Rev. Public Health*, *26*, 319-339.

[27] Vestergaard, A. (2008). Humanitarian branding and the media: The case of Amnesty International. *Journal of Language and Politics*, *7*(3), 471-493. Chouliaraki, L. (2010). Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian communication beyond a politics of pity. International journal of cultural studies, 13(2), 107-126. Orgad (2013) Visualizers of Solidarity. Fadlalla (2019) Branding Humanity.

[28] Boyte, H. C. (2018). *Awakening democracy through public work: Pedagogies of empowerment*. Vanderbilt University Press.

strategically connected with other organizations, whether in Liberia or internationally, to achieve its goals and aims? In what ways have these arts processes facilitated the development of shared values and beliefs locally? How have these organizations utilized arts and cultural practices to mobilize populations and collectively advocate for specific changes to national policies?

As I reviewed reports and other public texts of iNGOs operating in Liberia that support arts and cultural programming for youth intervention mandates and goals, I compared and contrasted their supported initiatives to B4YT's cultural product and process analyses to understand constraints and possibilities of B4YT and the goals of its student actors in the funding environment as well as the larger discourses circulating about youth in Liberia. In mapping B4YT within the larger youth development environment, I asked: *How are B4YT youth situated as both social (civic) actors and cultural actors? How, if at all, are they responsive to these global discourses or active change agents in performing new possibilities?*

Finally, I reviewed videos of previous performances and director's notes (which I wrote while in that position) to think about co-performance and how my own position in the space shaped the development of these cultural products. I wrote several memos that addresses aesthetic, donor, political, and activist concerns that affected gesture, staging, audience and overall performance outcomes. From this, I created a list of "look-fors" for quick reference in preparation for focus groups while in the rehearsal and co-performance phase. I also developed protocols using B4YT strategic plans and work plans from advocacy efforts to draft questions for staff, parent, and student interviews.

Phase 3: Rehearsal and Co-Performance: Monrovia and Gbarnga, Liberia

I engaged in co-performance (Conquergood, 2002; Madison, 2010) in daily rehearsals during playmaking process at B4YT and community-based performances and planning meetings of other advocacy organizations beginning roughly in mid-June through August, Monday-Friday, 9am-4pm with longer rehearsals during tech week. Many of these rehearsals were video recorded, especially those in which I took on a teaching or leadership role directly. I wrote field notes after each rehearsal and intermittent performances including audience responses/ questions/ planned actions. Additionally, I video recorded and captured photos from two full days of performances; one of which was a street parade of short scenes culminating in a stage performance.

During this phase, I also held semi-structured interviews with student actors, staff, parents and produced transcripts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transcribing software was not able to discern much of the interviews which were conducted in "simple" or Liberian English. Because of this, I transcribed many of the interviews myself and also had several transcribed by a research assistant and former B4YT student who recently moved to the United States from Liberia once I returned. Because he was not a student at the Bong County program site and did not know the students, parents, and staff there, I felt it would be ethical for the purposes of confidentiality, honor my commitment to involving co-performers in the research process, and produce more accurate transcripts that capture the nuances of Liberian English. I held 21 interviews with youth artists. 13 were with youth identifying as male or boy whereas 8 identified as girls, women or female; this ratio is closely representative of gender participation in the organization overall. The

youngest interviewee was 10 years old and the oldest was 21. Of those interviewed, 7 held positions as either Junior or Senior Arts Instructors having at least 4 years of experience as program participants. I also interviewed 15 parents and the National Director.

I held two focus groups with youth actors in Bong County. The first focus group was held with six Junior and Senior Arts Instructors using the protocol derived from the document review findings in Phase 2. The second was held with 8 program participants at the student level immediately following rehearsal which was captured by video and analyzed for gestures that invoke social hierarchies (Conquergood, 2002); video clips were viewed and discussed in this focus group using the event-recall-feedback method (Stone & Stone, 1981).

CHAPTER 3. From Beneficiaries to Civic Actors: Building a Theory of Change

> *"The challenging situation that people will talk about is uh they always talk about benefit. So when we say benefit, people feel that the way we run our programs where we create the opportunity for the children to go out and perform, they feel like we're using the kids to make money. That's how they feel so at the end of the day if you work hard, they come back and the people say 'oh they are using you people'. 'Paul' [they say to me], 'you all are making money from our young people'. [Adults tell the students] 'They taking you and carrying you… and then all the program and different thing you all can perform. That money he making'. That's just, some challenging situation. So at times going back, we try to create the awareness people know so from the perspectives of the community all the other people, because of that, one lady took her child from the program. The child still want to come they say, 'You can't go there. Paul is using you, the poor children, to make money'."* (Interview with Paul, National Director, November 24, 2018)

Since he was a child, Paul has lived in the same community as many of those who make these kinds of assertions, accessing the same environmental resources and constraints and neighborhood effects as everyone else. However, his affiliation with an organization tied to the international community shapes the perceptions that some of his own neighbors, with whom he shares a water pump and toilet facilities, have of him and what he should be doing for the children in their community. Though they bear witness daily to his quality of life which in many ways mirrors their own, some still spread false accusations based on their experiences and expectations of internationally-linked organizations.

Expectations, Hopes, and Educational Aspirations

It was a Thursday afternoon and the youth actors were busy in their rehearsal. I left the school building when one of the parents who had two children in the program came by to be interviewed. We walked the community to find a place that offered some

quiet and were offered two chairs to sit beside the outdoor kitchen of a young couple who had made a home out of a small brick structure that I had once considered renting to store items for the theatre company. They had negotiated a rent price with the landlady they could afford, put up a tin roof, painted, and laid flooring on the side that would be their bedroom. Proud of the work they had done to show themselves as an independent family able to live on their own as husband and wife, they offered us two chairs under the shade of their new roof. Mr. Kpowomou and I talked to the steady rhythm of the community: the sound of the metal spoon against the coal pot as the wife cooked, the "whoosh" of her fanning the flames, conversations from neighboring houses, horns of motorbikes, the soft breeze, and roosters calling. Mr. Kpowomou smiles and laughs telling me about the B4 exercises his children share with him after rehearsals. He talks about the physical theater and dance exercises to build ensemble and cooperation where one student rolls across the floor as his peers leap in sequence without stepping or falling on him. He moves his hands to mimic their playing of the recorder, which he calls a flute. The excitement on his face reminds me of his two sons when they are in their element and enjoying rehearsal. His tone changes when I ask him what other people tell him about B4. His face becomes more serious as he responds:

> Mr. Kpowomou: For me, in the community, I'm going to tell you my problem is not your problem. Your problem is not my problem. I sit by myself. Eh hehn. (His eyebrows raise slightly as his head lowers and he looks directly into my eyes, searching for my understanding). So you can't tell me today 'This person's like this,' it become a problem, I worry on that. No. I don't believe in it. I see it for myself."
>
> Jasmine: I understand.
>
> Mr. Kpowomou: Mm hhn (he nods)

Jasmine: So when other people have something to say, you don't even mind them?

Mr. Kpowomou: Mm hhn. I don't take part.

We continue the interview for another ten or so minutes, and when I reach the end of my questions, he shares that he has a question or two, and I shake my head encouraging him to ask. He continues with the question I expected, the question I've heard from parents across interviews:

Mr. Kpowomou: If B4 have any help for children? Hmm?

Jasmine: Financially, no. Until they become an instructor.

I explain the process of how students advance from being students to instructors, how instructor positions are compensated according to skill level and responsibility using his oldest son as an example. I assure him that once his son who is a Junior Arts Instructor serving an apprentice role, "does his job correctly, he will bring small thing home." He nods his head then suggests that the smaller children who can't be instructors at least get items like notebooks before school starts to encourage them. I agree with him with the caveat that the overall program budget is small and that what the organization does have is spent completely on supplies and to make sure there is enough to pay the instructors. That when it comes to other items, the organization really depends on sponsors who provide a variety of materials for the youth from year to year.

We thank each other and I turn off the recorder, and that's when our conversation really begins. He leans in and tells me quietly that some people think these people here (his eyes look around at the houses where we are sitting) are using the money from the

children. He explains that he didn't want to say it earlier because Paul's brother was outside. And though Paul himself has shared this with me in the past, I realize two things at once: the rumors of corruption levelled against Paul were much more insidious than I knew, and it is utterly unfathomable to parents and students that an organization with international support might exist to share knowledge rather than material goods. Performing this research as an international insider was quickly politicized. Parents saw this as a chance to report perceived corruption and mismanagement of funds, and it became my responsibility to clarify, time and time again, that the organization was there solely to provide arts learning activities. There was no extra money to distribute direct cash payments or material goods to the children.

Most times, hearing this from me resolved the parents' concerns and cleared their misjudgments of Paul, but I could sense that there was still a lingering expectation of what the organization would do to provide the tangible benefits international organizations were known to bring into communities. I met with Pauline whose son had also been in the program for many years, beginning his involvement at the same time as Mr. Kpowomou's sons. Pauline also happened to be related to Paul; she was his aunt.

> "Maybe he will get benefit tomorrow. I'm hoping it will be that he gets benefit tomorrow. The benefit maybe it will be to achieve good education tomorrow from B4. That they will be able to maybe educate him to go in higher education… No one is supporting him now. If the opportunity comes, he can get it from B4. Yes, I'm hoping that B4 will do that. Maybe at the time, when time goes, maybe things will change around. Because nothing good comes easily, everything when it's starting can be hard. But maybe in the future tomorrow the way things looking hard like this, they are not helping our children to support them in school. But maybe in time to come tomorrow maybe they will say, let's try to help this child to send to college or to achieve a better education tomorrow but it will not be today because nothing good comes easily. Yes, everything has to be, when you're starting it can be hard." (Parent interview, July 13, 2019)

Though Pauline recognized that the organization was not positioned to support the children by paying school fees or university tuition, she still had hope that this would change for her own child which would mean that within the next couple of years she envisioned things changing financially for the organization. She, like many other parents has an underlying assumption that organizations with international connections, regardless of being small, local, or community-based, should provide direct support for school fees and tuition.

> "Some of them feel that, oh well they have white lady over things, they feel that everything is just bread and butter. Oh well the person she came from America, she has money, why she not able to support our children? Yeah, paying money. And we the Liberian, it's not supposed to be that way to me. For me, there are human differences… That's what some people can always conclude. When y'all come from America, y'all come, they say oh the person has money, but it can't be easy sometimes… Like if I come in Liberia, I try to give money to other people, then when you come from America, you don't want to do it, I will just say, 'Oh, well the woman is acting mean.' Not knowing at the end of the day, you are struggling to survive. I will just say, you came from America, you're in Liberia. You are rich. The notion that some people get is that when y'all come from America, the white people, when y'all come, they just feel that y'all are rich."
>
> Jasmine:
> But they know we are not white people, actually.
>
> Pauline:
> "Yeah, I know but once they see your complexion, they will just you know, feel that way… The accent. (She gestures to her mouth). They will just have that same feeling. It's not so. Everybody is struggling at the end of the day."

Throughout the interview, Pauline referred to me as white at least three times despite her knowledge about Black Americans whose history of enslavement has shaped Liberia's own history. Invoking whiteness in this way maps financial freedom and the choice to help others financially onto international visitors, those from the United States in

particular. When Pauline points to my light-skinned complexion and accent as signs of wealth, she draws primarily on her experiences of seeing those who look and talk like me coming to visit Liberia. Her analysis of my own financial situation is informed by her experiences with the diaspora, often Liberian returnees, who dare not visit their home communities and villages without the visible and tangible evidence of their success abroad. They come bearing gifts out of tradition but also out of the necessity to demonstrate achievement for the sacrifices others have made for them to have the experience of learning and working abroad. As she describes, parents' feelings about the organization are based on their ideas about me personally. Their expectations of me are different than what they expect from those internationals they may come into contact with through development projects who are actually white. For them, as with most standard development projects, a learning-focused workshop or activity should come with the benefit of a T-shirt, hot meal, and a stipend. For me, in addition to these things, I and in turn, the theatre company and Paul as the National Director, are expected to deliver on their hopes of paid school fees and university tuition. These latter expectations are more commonly expected of family in the diaspora who make financial contributions towards such expenses in the form of remittances. Pauline expressed that it was important for her to make sure others took time to understand the dynamics around the organization's goals and funding abilities.

> "Nothing good comes easily. You have to struggle. You have to fight hard on it. You don't need to put money business first. You have to struggle. Struggle. And at the end of the day, through your good work, people will be able to help you. But many of our friends, or our children, their parents, the only thing they put first is money. Money. There's no money in the organization, there is no money. And I can always tell them say, you don't know what will be tomorrow, what will

> happen tomorrow. If the woman (she gestures to me) decide with money today encouraging the children with money, then tomorrow if they not take that thing serious, do you think it will be a help for her? No, it will not be a help for her. So you need to fight hard and struggle and fight, fight that tomorrow you will benefit good thing from B4. You don't have to put money first. And then they say, oh, maybe because you see that Paul, he's your close relative so you don't like to talk bad thing. No. Not only close relative but I know at the end of the day, there will be a good thing tomorrow."

The weight of misperceptions about the organization because of its international affiliation falls on Paul and his family to balance making it difficult to have a sustainable year-round program. One of Pauline's main criticisms of the organization was that the youth were not motivated to attend rehearsals unless their "boss lady… someone big" was present. Aside from Paul's work with the theatre company, his primary employment is with the Ministry of Education as a District Officer. He had to fight for this position despite having one of the highest test scores in the nation for the position and having earned a Masters degree abroad in China. Regardless of his success at balancing both job responsibilities while still a youth himself, barely more than 30 years old, his presence in the program was unable to sustain the regular commitment and involvement of participants. I doubt that even my presence over a sustained period of time would ignite improved participation if I was not seen through my mobility, moving in and out of the space and the culture, concretizing my role as a "boss." This title full of deference denotes a financial obligation requiring labor and demanding payment, if not now, then tomorrow, as Pauline stressed. It also creates distance between me and the community by marking my detachment. Conquergood (1985) refers to this stance where the researcher's identity and detachment coalesce in the "Custodian's Rip-Off" which is marked by

selfishness and plagiarism. What this stance does not consider is the nature of detachment.

In an earlier section of the interview, Pauline explained that to have money and not share it would make parents feel as though I (and thus the organization) was being "mean." That it was simply the matter that we were not helping their children because we did not want to. Whereas, in this case, mobility and detachment related to mobility, is predicated upon precarity for the organization and myself. My ability to move around Liberia and abroad is what creates more opportunities to support the organization. The "struggle" Pauline speaks of is one that I identify with personally and professionally, and it is what the organizing principles undergirding the theatre company's model are designed to help youth learn to navigate, to lift each other through creative, collective organizing. Pauline explains that the Arts Instructor position her son has is helpful, but that her hope is for the organization to create a pathway for him to gain opportunities beyond what she can provide.

> "For me, if he get that money, I will encourage him to get his uniform, pay his school fees, buy his copybook and be able to go to school… I can tell God thank you that B4 came and they accepted him to work because I was even thinking that when they open school, where will I get money from to support him in school?... At least he was selected to teach so at the end of the day the little thing he get he can help me to do whatsoever thing I can do for him… In time to come, will you all be able to help our children?... Will you be able to send my son out of Liberia to other country for studies? I'm bringing general questions."

All of these perceptions collide to reframe learning as labor. Even the opportunity to teach as an Arts Instructor only offers a temporary benefit in an extractive economy where the arts and entertainment industries are struggling at best. There are no

universities granting degrees in any artform and no jobs in the arts that the youth will not have to create for themselves. To the parents and youth in the organization, the expectation of tangible benefits flows from a hope that participation opens the doors to international connections that can create opportunities for international education and employment.

This rest of this chapter utilizes document review to develop a theory of change for the ways that young people in Liberia, who are often the primary targets of international interventions, come to take on the role of intermediaries filling a crucial gap between governmental and international nongovernmental institutions and their target populations during the Ebola crisis. I examine the processes by which young people gain opportunities to 'benefit' outside of being beneficiaries. Particularly, this theory of change suggests how empowerment mechanisms such the theatre company's Arts Instructor leadership development can prepare young artists to serve as implementing partners for major development projects taking the case of the youth's 2014-2015 Ebola-free Liberia campaign.

Interventioning Youth through Social Marketing and Humanitarian Branding: The case of the Ebola-Free Liberia campaign

As intermediaries of large-scale public health interventions, or implementing partners, these youth take action towards solving problems as a strategic move leveraging a shift in the field of international development and humanitarianism towards greater reflexivity. I use the conceptual frameworks offered by humanitarian branding and social marketing to focus on what is exchanged between young people and these organizations

through partnerships on public health interventions. This case offers a new way of understanding the mechanisms which create the possibilities for youth to transform from beneficiaries to civic actors as an instance of the incorporation of youth as implementing partners in larger health and civil society campaigns in Africa. I consider the ways in which youth in Liberia are historically *interventioned* and how they come to exercise authority and give voice to issues on which their voices are rarely heard.

> Children's voices reach a broader platform only in rare, and sometimes tragic, cases, but even then those subaltern voices are often immediately recuperated, transformed, and inserted into different narratives and agendas set by other interest groups (Honwana & DeBoeck, 2005, p. 2).

The photos below demonstrate how youth voices may be captured and exploited to reproduce grand narratives of African crisis, dependency and Western paternalism.

I use the term *interventioned* similarly to the way in which Foucault (1976) uses medicalization to describe the process by which people through power embedded in systems are disciplined and made into medical subjects. In this study, I consider the ways in which youth, their families, and program staff describe their expectations of international organizations' programs to demonstrate how these programs discipline and condition youth making them into beneficiaries. Secondly, I consider how exchanges between youth actors as implementing partners and funding institutions, whether international or governmental, create pathways to empowerment.

The word "benefit" has a particular meaning in the Liberian international development context which considers primarily tangible (i.e. financial, material or direct funding support for school fees) inputs as benefits. These expectations have been shaped largely by international NGOs and humanitarian organizations operating in Liberia since

the end of the civil war in the early 2000s. The post-conflict landscape cemented the role of international organizations in the provision of basic goods and services to sustain daily life, the implementation of education and skills training, and influence on public sector policies with a focus on those pertaining to the protection of war victims. The primary beneficiaries of such interventions were women and children. Though recent years have seen a shift in the planning and methods of health-focused organizations towards incorporating elements of the social marketing approach, remnants of post-conflict remedies to the social determinants of health, such as education and economic mobility, remain and have become part of the general expectations and demands made by target populations. Many of the participants in this study expect to receive a T-shirt, hot meal and stipend for their efforts and time in training and informal educational activities.

Social marketing is an approach that is increasingly used to create strategies for public health interventions. It aims to shape the environment in which an intervention is implemented so that the healthy choice becomes the "easy" choice. This means that demands of the target population are met as consumers of the interventions being provided. Conceived of as a new social contract (French et al., 2010), the exchange of goods or services that individuals and communities value for their acceptance of a given intervention is key to this approach. Social marketing more broadly is a well-developed area of scholarship and practice and has been integrated into numerous health communication interventions. It is an adaptation of commercial marketing techniques that influences behavior and practices in a positive way allowing for improvements in personal welfare and society. In the photo below, the youth theatre artists featured are

intermediaries in this social marketing "mix" as they deliver only one aspect of a complex campaign in the fight against Ebola. The UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, centered below, visited many of the coordinated efforts that were part of the social marketing strategy led by UNICEF in Liberia. Through this image, many dominant narratives and agendas are reinforced. First, this image centers the white, male international rather than the local youth actors. The focus is on what he did as a participant inserting their work into white savior discourses and the persistence of Western paternalism in Africa.

The impressive amounts of people that were informed about prevention by the youth was not the narrative; rather, a white body simply being present signifies that "Ebola-ravaged Liberia" is now safe. Further, the logos on the shirts feature UNICEF and a local municipal government but do not include the organization logo. Their bodies are branded by these two external entities that came on board to support long after the youth had already begun early awareness efforts. Without the caption beneath the photo which incorrectly gives the organization name, the youth would be unidentifiable and receive no recognition. The theatre artists' involvement represents the local direct engagement awareness effort as their T-shirts declare, "Ebola Must Go," whereas Bloom's presence in Liberia represents the role of the international community in developing the mechanisms for local efforts to succeed. In this photo taken in 2015, world-renown actor Bloom's travel to Liberia and activity with its people is a sign that the intervention has been successful and those in the international community can safely return to Liberia.

Figure 2 B4 Youth Theatre Ebola drama team featured in USA Today with UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2015/03/23/orlando-bloom-visits-ebola-ravaged-liberia/70338108/ Retrieved January 14, 2021.

Humanitarian branding, works alongside of iNGO social marketing strategies, adding authority to the voices of youth who are often ignored on public issues. Characterized by reflexivity in media representations of suffering, humanitarian branding uses juxtaposition of the difference between self and other as a call-to-action (Vestergaard, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2010). Its key element is making the connections between people visible. Anthropologist Amal Fadlalla (2019) documents the emergence of humanitarian

branding in the 1990s accompanying a shift towards identity politics which she describes as, “collective organizing around singular issues… an approach that often essentializes these identities [women, ethnic, religious groups] and presents them as core arguments for accessing civil and economic liberties” (p. 15-16). Though she does not include youth as one of these identity categories, she documents the ways in which youth in the Sudan utilize the cultural arts to gain visibility as humanitarian ambassadors for various international organizations. Through this lens, the demands for T-shirts, hot meals, and stipends become expectations rooted in an ethic of care between people who share a common identity-based citizenship. These benefits are also earned as young people’s talents circulate as commodities linked to a specific organization’s brand. In this notion of exchange, international organizations are legitimized while simultaneously creating broader platforms for youth to raise their voices as knowledge-bearers.

In the photo below (Figure 2), the youth actors are centered surrounded by an audience of children and adults in a covered outdoor market. One actor smiles broadly while the other leans away, arms crossed over his chest with a look of skepticism. They portray characters that the audience is likely to encounter in everyday life as they grapple with the realities of the spread of a deadly virus and the new behaviors that are required to prevent the threat to their own health and the well-being of their families and communities. Their T-shirts bear their own slogan, “Ebola-free Liberia” and have the theatre company logo with UNICEF’s logo. By partnering with the youth actors who are in direct engagement and multi-directional knowledge sharing with audiences, UNICEF builds local legitimacy by taking early action in a public health crisis which was greatly

needed after the UN's detrimental role and subsequent denial of responsibility in Haiti's 2010 cholera outbreak.[29] Having these public health messages performed on youth bodies further concretizes UNICEF's commitment to young people for the target audience of women and children. For the youth actors, the T-shirt with the appropriate logos, slogan and "Ebola Awareness Drama Street Team" identifier across the back (not pictured) establishes their authority on these issues. The T-shirt is evidence that they have attended a training and that the information they are providing is credible even if it is contested as actionable in specific communities. Here, the youth actors serve as intermediaries, bringing closer international expertise on combatting the spread of the virus and the realities of implementation in local communities.

[29] Domonoske, C. (2016). U.N. Admits Role In Haiti Cholera Outbreak That Has Killed Thousands. https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/08/18/490468640/u-n-admits-role-in-haiti-cholera-outbreak-that-has-killed-thousands Retrieved January 14, 2021.

Figure 3. B4 Youth Theatre actors perform a short drama in a market as children and adults gather to watch. Photo credit Silas Juaquellie

I use this case of the Ebola-free Liberia campaign to develop a theory of change about how young people strategically navigate international and governmental interventions to leverage resources to make their voices heard and to solve problems within their community, nation, and the globe without being exploited by either. Youth who become involved in these efforts as part of the social marketing "mix" and/or in alliance with humanitarian projects often experience empowerment. Their intermediary role offers a range of benefits and requires a variety of costs. This chapter contours youth definitions of health by illuminating the duality of "benefits" with a focus on how they identify those which they have reason to value. I ask, how youth gain authority as bearers of knowledge through performance and how these performances of knowledge constitute civic praxis. I present a theory of change that demonstrates how students move from disempowered

beneficiaries to empowered civic actors who take action to improve quality of life and well-being for themselves and their communities. This theory of change has implications for how popular theatre can impact local level practice, national level policy, and create global awareness in times of crisis.

"I Going to B4, I Going to School"

After a full day of rehearsal, I sit with Peter in the now empty rehearsal space. He is excited about the opportunity to do an interview and to have his thoughts recorded. I hand him the voice recorder and he holds it directly in front of his face to make sure every word is captured. His whole body is energetic as he speaks as though the excitement from the rehearsal is still coursing through his veins. It is an excitement that I recognize, the way I feel when I'm backstage, about to make an entrance. He maintains this energy through the entire interview telling me about the original song he wrote and recorded with a sound engineer after learning how to compose music as part of the program. He tells me, as his mother did, how being part of the theatre company has changed him from someone who did not have a life where he was getting any result to feeling purposeful. His song was titled, "Changed One" and he explained that he wrote it to give his friends advice that what they are doing "isn't good so they should make a change and life will never be the same." He continues to share:

> "I always encourage my friends to join because, if we [are] on the football field when we go, when they ask me, what y'all want for us to do, [that is] when big person come; what y'all want for us to do for the team? Most of my friends they sit sad, I can raise up my hand and talk. Then when they ask me, some of them can say my man why your, as soon na somebody ask question you can join there? I say when you check behind me good good, you will see B4 spirit there… I encourage them mostly to come."

> *I ask him,* "And what do other people say about B4?"
>
> *Peter replies,* "Most people say, like the big big people that living around our area who not have interest in B4, they say B4 that children play, they can't give money. I always tell them that, I can always bring it to the academic school. I can tell them say, when you going to school, you don't expect nobody to pay you. You expect result, you ain't expect no body to pay you. So it like the same thing I going to B4, I going to school. My the one the one they giving there, which I learning, it alright, not money." (Youth actor interview, July 31, 2019).

Peter recognizes the intrinsic benefits of being an active participant of the theatre company. He speaks about how the experiences have changed him personally by making his life meaningful. He views himself as someone who can serve as a role model by giving advice to his peers and encouraging them to take advantage of an opportunity to join into the program he credits as being responsible for this positive change. The example of advocating for the needs of his football team when others were "sad" or disempowered to speak is shared as evidence of how his involvement has resulted in his ability to articulate his concerns to those of social status that is higher than his own. In his experience, those "big people" who are older and often more financially stable, do not have interest in the organization because without receiving money, involvement is considered to be "children['s] play". He quickly defends his stance comparing the education he receives in the theatre company to his formal or academic education experience in school where one does not expect to benefit financially but to benefit from learning. His parents also see the change he describes. In his mother's interview, she confirms that his involvement pays off in terms of keeping him out of trouble, encouraging his ability to create music, and even be more responsible at home. For Peter

and his family, these intrinsic benefits are valued. However, this is not the case with others from the same community.

For some families, the financial burden of schooling children and feeding a household takes precedence over allowing a young person to take part in this informal educational experience. One student who had been active with the organization since 2013 was pressured by his family to leave the theatre company and take an immediate job selling items that earned him roughly $20 US dollars each month. Though the theatre company offered seasonal employment during the vacation time from school which pays nearly five times that amount, the instability of theatre employment was too great a cost. His mother sadly shared that her son would not be able to continue with the program. She first asked how long the program runs, three or five years, assuming it was part of a grant-funded intervention. I explained that it was a local NGO and community effort to which she responded that though she recognized the benefit of the learning the youth actors received, without any benefit that would help pay school fees he would have to leave. These tensions were often stronger for older youth such as her son who had just completed high school with no prospects for work or college. Parents of younger students seemed to be able to justify having their children participate as the concern for their transition to adulthood was a bit further off.

> "The only benefit is what she learning. Really, the benefit she is getting is what she learning from B4, she will practice it tomorrow. What she practicing now, she will put it up tomorrow. So that will be a benefit. So not to say that she have to come, we expect her to come and get billions of dollars from B4- no. But any, if B4 feel like giving her any reward, no problem, we'll hold it (laughs) and she's a student so we'll hold it but we're not here for benefit, whether she will get benefit." (parent interview, July 28, 2019, 2:38PM)

There is a duality and an ongoing tension in understanding the value-laden notion of what it means to benefit and to be a beneficiary. Receiving short-term tangible benefits makes one a beneficiary in the view of the parents and older community members described. The theatre company's model is not built to provide basic needs and individual goods but social goods in the form of education which explains the disappointment and challenges stated in the opening excerpt by the National Director. However, as some youth actors and their families expressed, a competing view of "benefit" is what comes in the future as a result of learning. They see these performances in the theatre company as a long-term investment. However, other families do not have the option of waiting for the return on that investment and place their value in opportunities that can provide short-term benefits. These considerations undergird the kind of programming that is valued by the youth and their immediate communities and determines the kinds of partnerships that both, align with the organization's mission of empowerment and sustain the participation of its members.

Implementing Partners as Intermediaries

The theatre company's mission-driven commitment to long-term educational benefits is complicated by partnerships with organizations that use a mix of consumer-oriented strategies. Outside of the organization's signature program model which utilizes community organizing strategies to teach playwriting on issues identified by the youth, B4 Youth Theatre sometimes partners with organizations that have a more explicit agenda to influence a certain policy or practice. In the case where the youth-identified issues align with the agendas of iNGOs which often have funding mechanisms in place to

support research and outreach, there may be potential for partnership. The Ebola crisis was one such instance. In a planning meeting in 2014, the youth decided that it was their responsibility as citizens to educate the society about Ebola, and they set out to do this work on their own until UNICEF allocated funding towards expanding their early awareness efforts that incorporated the youth's street dramas into their broader strategy. UNICEF provided a range of benefits: training workshops on Ebola prevention, printed flip booklets with text and images about the signs and symptoms of Ebola, hundreds of posters with prevention information, T-shirts and implementation costs such as transportation, hand sanitizer, buckets, snacks, drinking water and instructor stipends.[30] This arrangement was mutually beneficial making it possible for UNICEF to gain information about specific communities' capacity to implement best practices and for the youth to scale their efforts by traveling to new parts of the country they had never seen before, meet people they would never encounter otherwise, and speak before audiences of hundreds and thousands.[31] However, the satisfaction of the youth and their families was short lived.

Within a few months as greater amounts of foreign assistance was poured into fighting Ebola, many people began to be trained and paid as contact tracers and for other Ebola-related work. The benefits associated with these positions had a greater short-term value to the youth and their families which created many tensions between the youth and their parents, as well as, the instructors and the National Director who were receiving

[30] B4 Youth Theatre internal documents. Ebola-free Liberia budget.
[31] See Blanks Jones, J. L. (2018). FLIPPING THE PANOPTICON. Competing Frameworks: Global and National in Citizenship Education, 137.

stipends.[32] By this time in September of 2014, I had already left Liberia and despite the strongest attempts of the administrative team on the ground, they were unable to renegotiate arrangements to reflect the value of the youth's work without my presence.[33] It was not until the visit from the Goodwill ambassador that additional funding was secured to provide a new set of benefits for the youth including new T-shirts, a hot meal, and stipends. These funds were made available out of a need to tell a specific story about their humanitarian work which was embodied in a white male ambassador who shared a common identifier with the youth as an actor. This connection, however small, contributed to UNICEF's branding as an organization that connects people across the global to build local capacity in solving global health issues.

As intermediaries in the marketing "mix" of iNGO interventions, the ability to negotiate is crucial. It is not enough for youth to be talented, to understand how to engage an audience, to be skilled in developing workplans and implementing them, and to produce a quality report. Additionally, organizations that fill this gap between funding organizations and their target audiences need to understand the business of international development contracts, funding cycles, and internal mechanisms of program design and implementation. Therefore, the ability to develop connections and relationships with people who can facilitate their involvement and help them navigate the process is an essential component of creating real opportunities for young people's voices to be

[32] Juaquellie, S. B4 Youth Theatre internal report. 2015.

[33] See Abramowitz (2014) she describes the need for an outsider connection to facilitate connections for local NGOs. Abramowitz, S. A. (2014). Searching for Normal in the Wake of the Liberian War. University of Pennsylvania Press.

amplified. This is the role of a facilitator. This facilitator can often provide an evidence-based or procedurally sound justification for change that will support the work of the intermediary. This is the role I served and documented through the lens of performance ethnography which brings the active function of witnessing- presenting a call-to-action to those who hold power from within the knowledge of the performing ensemble (see Appendix A). It is the function of "paying attention"[34] and bringing to bear the nuanced ways that performance-based work fills gaps in the various components of interventions that aim to understand their target audience differently; this may be considered a form of market research critical to social marketing.

[34] Madison, D. S. (2006) The Dialogic Performative in Critical Ethnography, Text and Performance Quarterly, 26:4, 320-324, DOI: 10.1080/10462930600828675

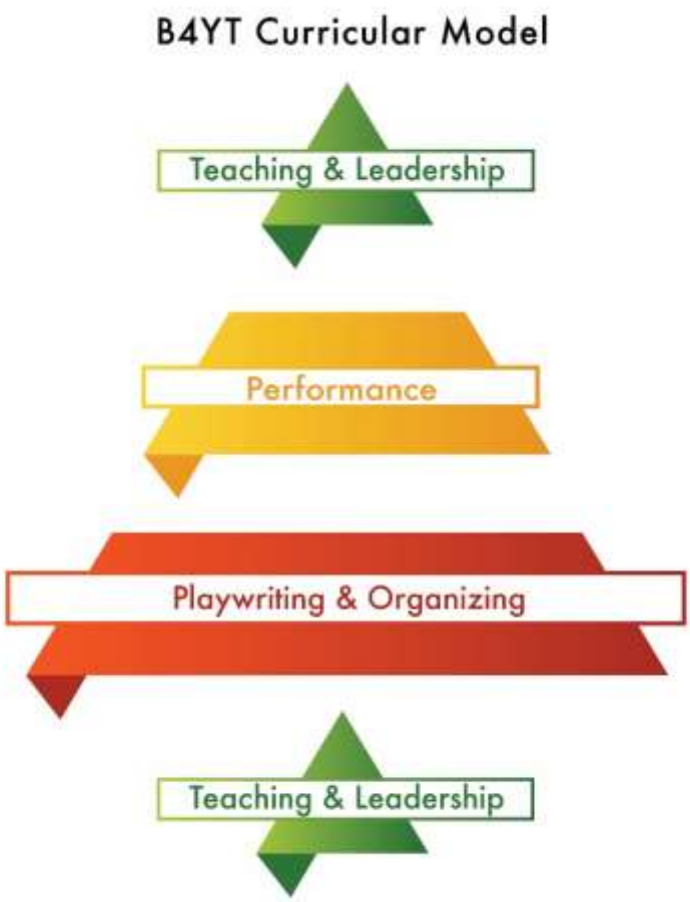

Figure 4. B4YT Curricular Model. Standard program model with a foundation of playwriting using components of community organizing for all participants in the full program. Performances comprise the second tier. They are public and often involve travel. Teaching and leadership opportunities are given to participants who successfully advance through the first two tiers. These participants in turn infuse the model from the foundational learning experiences.

Figure 4 above, represents B4 Youth Theatre's standard curricular model when they are not engaged as intermediaries as part of foreign campaigns. This is the work that runs without my engagement or interference. When I do intervene in their standard process of delivering the signature Vacation School for the Arts program which utilizes this model, my involvement actually runs the risk of reframing the youth artists' work as

an international project instead of a local one. In 2019, the youth artists put on a large performance parade bringing together the young people from three counties where they had program sites. The sun was merciless as the police held traffic for an impromptu performance given by nearly 40 children and youth whose sweat and song poured into the intersection at the central market. The crowd continued to gather through performances of the National Anthem on the recorder instrument, a drama on girls' education and child labor, and a dance the youth choreographed to a popular hipco song. As their performance ended, the National Director Paul was nowhere in sight having gone to find more drinking water. From behind the camera, I looked from one instructor to the next as each looked back at me and I resumed my other role as Executive Director, addressing the audience in my American English-inflected version of Liberian English. I had been made, my cover was blown. Everyone now knew there was a foreigner behind the project and the weight of the expectation of US-supported institutions was heavy with economic and sociopolitical assumptions.

Later, at the indoor program, an effort was made by a former Assistant Minister of Education to bring the audience's attention to the realization that this was a program run by Liberians for Liberians, but perhaps the damage had already been done. I stood beside her on the stage though I had no formal role on the program except to distribute certificates and pose with students for photos as the program ended. My physical presence gave the program a stamp of legitimacy being the foreign "expert" or knowledge-bearer with the presupposed authority to credentialize youth actors by giving them a certificate of program completion. This performative act was fundamentally at

odds with the theatre company's core values built on community organizing and citizen-level politics as it simultaneously legitimized their work and reinforced the perception that foreign expertise is of greater value than local knowledge. Anthropologist and performance studies scholar Soyini Madison (2007) vis-à-vis Dwight Conquergood describes the local as having porous borders interwoven with global stories. In this instance, the local and global collide in 'centripetal pulls' between performances of nationalism and international expertise. Here, the youth actors navigate a 'tactical struggle' to be perceived as legitimate through an international, American connection (p. 829).

The foundation of the Theory of Change is the Playwriting and Organizing component that forms the core of the theatre company's model. Several of the initial phases of traditional Theatre for Development models are included in this foundational stage: catalyst, research, scenario creation, and improvisation (see Appendix B, Kalipeni & Kalmongera) or familiarization, research, data analysis, theatre creation (see Appendix C, Nyoni). The playwriting and organizing stage is derived from Harry Boyte's Public Achievement model which focuses on the micro and meso levels of social change. For Boyte, politics is about what average people are being and doing, not about the "experts," such as those critiqued in international education development (Tikly, 2017; Boyte, 2020). In *Everyday Politics* (2004), Boyte describes politics as embedded in the activities of citizens; this is, diverse people coming together to solve problems collectively which he refers to as public work. He offers a political theory that is capable of centering the voices of local youth. His concept of public work deprofessionalizes politics, removing it

from the terrain of experts and making it accessible to amateurs, which in this case centers youth who are not of age to participate in formal political processes or who may be of age but experience political marginalization. Boyte's conceptualization of public work promotes shared understandings of "power", "citizen", and "politics" to unpack the political economy of everyday performances which may include: youth responses to large-scale communications messaging from government and international NGOs, as well as, international financial support for grassroots-level organizing. This process includes an issues summit, stakeholder analysis, powermapping exercise, and one-to-one interviews which are bridged with the playwriting process through conducting these interviews in character.

By conducting original research on the issues, stakeholders and political decision-making processes, youth develop characters that embody and emulate actual political figures in their society. This is the foundation of connecting their playmaking praxis to the issues they have defined as being most pressing. In this character research, youth analyze media sources, conduct interviews with the actual political figure if possible, otherwise with a source that can provide a unique lens relevant to their concerns, and other policy documents or public statements that give clues as to how a character in this position might navigate their role in addressing a particular issue based on political and personal motivations arising from their own power and interest in the issue. Their theatre creations become a window for imagining potential solutions.

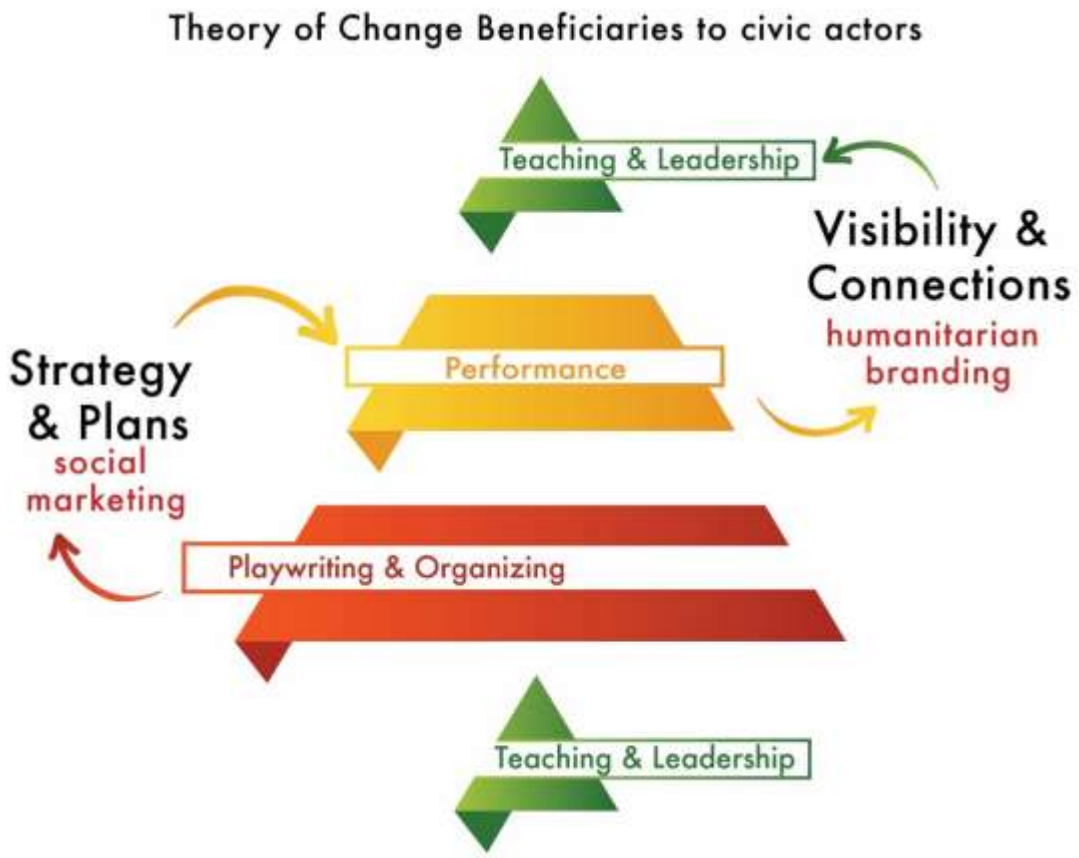

Figure 5. The B4YT curricular model shifts certain components through partnership activities. The foundational playwriting and community organizing strategies feed social marketing- oriented aspects of partnerships. Social marketing strategies and plans impact performances designed to complement or fill in gaps in market research and/or dissemination efforts. Performances are a way to also build brand legitimacy. Partnerships which engage youth performers for their branding purposes in exchange provide greater visibility and connections that give young people authority to teach and lead.

In Figure 5, the arrows demarcate a formal facilitator role for an intermediary to the intermediaries. In other words, my role as an international actor within the space of the youth's project as part of the marketing mix enables them to shift their local focus strategically to speak directly to the aims and goals of iNGO partners. Borrowing from Madison (2010), I use the term 'bearing witness' to describe the function of this intermediary for intermediaries role which I argue is as important in the field, where it

bridges research and practice, as it is in the presentation of research for an audience beyond that of its immediate research context. In bearing witness, the performance ethnographer serves as a bridge, an advocate, between performers and iNGOs. Bearing witness as acting in accordance with the youth's own terms is a function which operates not just in how the ethnographic work is presented for audiences far but for audiences near. The researcher's ability to make connections with other internationals should be used, in the view of the youth, to advocate for their needs that are beyond the scope of the arts programming as the parents alluded to in their interviews. The performance ethnographer must not only bear a research risk by being open to having their scholarship reshaped and collaboratively constructed and analyzed, but also take professional risks as they build connections in international development. An immediacy is required to acting ethically with youth communities that does not allow for their needs to be construed towards future-leaning endeavors; they are beings for the present making demands in the here and now.

The theatre pedagogy unique to B4YT as it draws on Boyte's notion of deprofessionalizing politics, making this realm accessible to amateurs (citizen politics) also acknowledging that this "power to" from the language of community contributes to the youths' ability and desire to make demands of the organization and their expectations that the organization will advocate on their behalf with connected institutions and individuals to bring their expectations into fruition. The ethnographer who bears witness has the response-ability to negotiate for the terms on which the strategies and plans of partner iNGOs meet the immediate demands of the youth artist intermediaries. In the

Ebola Free Liberia campaign, the youth required PPE, snacks and water, and other necessities to maintain their own wellness in order to perform. These and other demands were built into their initial contract through my negotiations with the partner iNGO. Similarly, the ethnographer who bears witness serves the function of helping partner iNGOs to watch and hear differently. Performances in local context by youth whose voices are not often heard in international development discourse require a certain level of "paying attention" uncommon to those who are not often engaged in the arts as a tool for both dissemination and knowledge co-creation. Madison (2006) asserts that paying attention to performances as they emerge takes into account

> "collaborations and motions that generate them. You not only do what the subject does, but you are intellectually, relationally, and emotionally invested in their symbol making practices and social strategies as you experience with them a range of yearnings and desires—coperformance is a doing with deep attention to and with others" (p. 323).

With each new project, the youth undergo a process of identifying stakeholders, and year after year that I have watched this process, without fail, iNGOs top the list of those institutions, organizations, and individuals which hold both power and interest on every issue they identify as being very important to youth in Liberia. The international community, comprised of iNGOs and Liberians in the diaspora, is a fixed feature of their lived realities and how they imagine themselves being and moving in the world. As the international community generally, and iNGOs particularly, directly impact national policy, media, influencing and advocacy, employment and educational opportunities, the discursive field on which solutions are proposed for a seemingly narrow issue may be quite expansive. A performance given in the context of a campaign about gender-based

violence may, in actuality, be advocating for change in educational policy rather than the justice system; I revisit this scenario in chapter 3. Watching and hearing their performances attuned to these relations allows their solutions to be understood differently than they may appear at face value. Performance ethnography as method for researching participatory arts also functions as theory for how artists' gain authority as civic actors.

Performance ethnographers who bear witness are charged with helping stakeholders see and hear these performances differently so that they gain the ability to respond according to the youths' own terms. Through this, iNGOs not only address an evidence-based gap between Liberian youth and youth from other parts of the world but become able to build their capacity- their real opportunities to be and do what they have reason to value.[35] Advocacy born of bearing witness informs the mechanisms by which iNGOs may ethically create the visibility and connections that both, benefit their own branding efforts and yield real opportunities for youth artist intermediaries to lead and teach others. The performance ethnographer who bear witness, who serves as an intermediary to artist intermediaries, assists the development of programs that generate sustainability at the local level and ownership of projects, ideas, and discourses that develop shared values around health issues.

Performance Acts on the Actors and Audience

The performance stage presents potential for change among both actors and audiences. Few studies demonstrate the impact of Theatre for Development[36] interventions on the actors (Chivandikwa, 2018; Plastow, 2015; Courtney & Battye,

[35] Here I understand capacity building through Amartya Sen's capabilities approach.
[36] See appendices A, B, and C for models of Theatre for Development.

2018). Of 35 interviews of parents and youth actors, all but one directly shared that the ability to speak publicly was an important way that they have changed through their involvement with the organization and its partners:

> "first when I joined B4, I wasn't able to stand among three or two persons and speak my mind. But since I joined this organization, I can stand among thousands of people, speak what's in my mind. It has also helped me go many places I have never gone before, interacted with many stars I have not met before, like Orlando Bloom a movie actor and performed on the same stage. That encouraged me a lot… If they come and learn about this theatre thing, it will help them... When they are part of the drama, they will be outspoken. They won't be shame because it's something helping to to develop their mind." (JAI interview July 5, 2019).

Public speaking was the most cited value across all interviews in this data set. Those who are of greater financial means or who are more articulate are also more politically engaged (French et al, 2010; Young, 2002). The youth actors and their parents value the opportunities to perform for giving them the ability to speak publicly without shame. This is a game-changer that results in them becoming outspoken in their daily lives, exposed to more places, and having interactions with people from other parts of the world. Moreover, rather than focusing on the external outcomes of having this ability, many of the youth actors and their parents shared the ways that performance provides an intrinsic impact which develops the mind, builds confidence, and creates more avenues for young people to associate with their peers and those outside of their day-to-day experiences.

Performance gives the youth artists a way to show up and be heard in a society that often expects, even demands, that young people be seen and not heard. Performance complicates this expectation by making it acceptable for young people to give voice to

their concerns as people not just as youth or children.[37] Here, one parent describes the relationship they have observed between citizenship development and arts-based performances:

> "Really there is a connection because if they focus on what they are doing at B4 that will make them to become viable in the future. They will become somebody who is able to be outspoken, they will be able to present themselves. People will do well if only they focus on what they have been taught to do. When they focus on it, they will be better for themselves tomorrow" (Parent interview, July 19, 2019).

For this parent, the value of youth performance is in its educational ability to emerge as a particular kind of person who becomes viable through the presentation of self through speech; their performing bodies are grafted onto the future. Whereas, the youth see the value these experiences add to their present capabilities. In the Liberian context, great respect and emphasis is placed on the ability to speak well as key to becoming someone good in society. Several interviews also comment on the ability to speak a "good" form of English which is also made more accessible through theatre training as the youth take on a variety of character speech. This ability to speak standard English, often referred to as "series" or serious English instead of the colloquial Liberian English is also key to navigating systems dominated by foreigners. Using this form of English allows the youth actors to be taken seriously as people who should be heard in society. The youth actors in

[37] The problematic nature of representation in identity-based politics arises here as only certain youth- those who are articulate- are able to rise above silencing cultural norms. In the spirit and contention of W.E.B DuBois's "talented tenth", I lift the possibility that deeper social cleavages may be reinscribed as inclusivity is in some ways limited to youth who have access to some formal education and have some ability to read and write, and also to those who have the real opportunity to participate where it does not place an unbearable sacrifice on households that depend on youth to earn money or contribute to the care of younger children. This tension highlights the potential of theatre in helping young people navigate inequitable systems on one hand while reinforcing the harmful narrative of exceptionality on the other.

this study gain skills in public speaking not as individuals but as a collective. Both parents and youth share how young people begin their participation being shy and not feeling able to speak, but then transition into somebody who has a voice they are not ashamed to make heard. Though there are many speech and debate clubs throughout the country that focus on building individuals' oratorial skills, theatre uniquely offers the opportunity to engage youth who are less likely to speak before a crowd on their own but are much more inclined to tell a story with friends.

The impacts of these performances on the audience are far-reaching and require an analysis that includes the role of the actors and facilitator. Through the lens of direct-action organizing (Boyte, 2010; Alinsky, 2010), the practice of theatre becomes symbolic action upon being performed for local audiences (Turner, 2018). The youth, together with their coach or facilitator, present a call-to-action which Madison (2010) describes as "response-ability" asserting that in bearing witness to injustice, the facilitator does not only have the responsibility to take action but to open possibilities for others to take action in response to what was experienced in the field and presented through performance. "The major work of performance ethnography is to make performances that do the labor of advocacy, to do it ethically to inspire realms of reflection and responsibility" (p. 12). These performances become ethical when the ethnographer is doubly reflexive, representing herself in the performance as a way of being accountable for biases, vulnerabilities, and blind spots. Similarly, the young people in this study involve themselves in the playmaking process as a reflexive praxis by which they are able to share their own truths as they advocate for change. This empowers the audience to in-

turn, speak their truths by airing their grievances and pointing out potential implementation failures based off of the information shared in the performance.[38]

This exchange between youth actors and audience is an important part of political socialization processes that occur outside of the classroom yet have a tremendous impact on civic education during health crises. Explicit attention to the public performances of youth artists juxtaposed with experiences teaching these methods to their peers reveals how young people in this study become community and even national role models whose work in times of crisis may even gain global attention. Anthropologist Amal Fadlalla (2019) describes the way in which young people who become involved in this kind of activism are branded as humanitarians through their public work:

> "the performance of humanity and the formation of a humanitarian public (are) two mutually reinforcing processes through which new activists, celebrities, role models, and their audiences are socialized into the fields of human rights of humanitarianism. These processes make it possible for emerging activists and role models to be inserted into an imagined transnational community governed by human rights and humanitarian legal and moral codes. These moral codes transcend the capacity of the nation-state" p. 29.

In the staging of public work, we can witness in condensed time-space the paradox of young people's active investments in Liberian civic life as emerging citizens while simultaneously enacting political attachments to global humanitarian issues:

> Arts have created opportunities for me locally and should I say with foreign or international people who have come to Liberia to work… Everywhere I go, people know me, so I'm like "ah, I'm a star" and I use it on my reference [resume]; I tell people to check my profile on B4YT website. [I gave] help to the

[38] See Sonke & Pesata (2015)'s argument about the greater impact on behavior change from audience members urging their personal network of those who did not see the performance to adapt the best practices presented.

> health sector in 2014 when Ebola was very deadly… So I don't just think of myself as someone who can make a change. If I'm continuously empowered and supported, the change will always come. What do I mean by empowerment? If I'm empowered to acquire knowledge, I can be a change to this nation even more than I have already done. And the support has to do with financial, spiritual, physical supports. (Youth Arts Instructor Interview, July 10, 2019).

Serving as intermediaries in iNGO interventions who engage the target population through theatre opens multidirectional communication. Once empowered with knowledge from trainings, the finances to implement their work, and the confidence that comes with being part of the theatre ensemble, youth artists were able to create change that impacts best practices and policies around Ebola prevention. Where the audience pushes back against their performance, describing how certain aspects will fail in their community for a number of reasons, the youth actors are able to on-the-spot perform a variety of scenarios to collectively brainstorm new community solutions. These crucial post-performance discussions are data which is shared back to the iNGO partner in reports and meetings that often rely on a coach or facilitator to reinforce the most salient points of disconnect and negotiate new terms of engagement where theory and practice meet.

Successful negotiations lead to official changes in best practices messaging. For example, one community was adamant that the performance of the best practice that cautions people not to touch any sick person was not actionable because there is no PPE in their area clinics and there are no cars. The only way to get someone to be treated is by physically assisting their transport to care. Reconsiderations of this best practice through many discussions with the iNGO eventually led to a change in messaging that urged people in these situations to use plastic bags to cover themselves on any points of

connection with someone showing signs or symptoms of Ebola.[39] The youth integrated this new messaging into future performances for like communities identified by the iNGO where access to the items needed to more safely assist the sick would also not be likely.[40] When youth work to reshape their theatre creation to incorporate this new messaging, their roles shift to those of leaders and teachers who meet communities where they are, drawing on their prior knowledge, to help them understand what behaviors and practices may save the lives of their families and broader community.

Youth who successfully participate in each of these phases described are offered the opportunity to apply for a position as an arts instructor to take formal leadership in the theatre company designing lesson plans and teaching this model to their peers in other parts of the country. This Theory of Change draws on the organization's longer history of sharing educational messages with the broader public[41], and a more recent trend of ambassadorship that is used to set individuals apart for their ability to influence their communities which Fadlalla describes as "routing visibilities" producing hyper-visibility which brands subaltern human rights and humanitarianism actors as role models (Fadlalla, 2019). As the youth in this program model transition from students to performers to teachers and leaders, they gain access to financial support and broaden their

[39] See story of Fatu Kekula, nursing student who saved family using plastic bags. Dixon, R. 2014. In Liberia, one woman's singular fight against Ebola. https://www.latimes.com/world/africa/la-fg-in-liberia-woman-fight-ebola-20141005-story.html#:~:text=Liberian%20student%20nurse%20Fatu%20Kekula,plastic%20bags%2C%20gloves%20and%20masks.&text=Local%20doctors%20were%20horrified. Retrieved January 18, 2021.

[40] Also see Benson & Otegbayo (2017) who document how in Hepatitis B awareness, practitioners linked key issues identified by communities with NGO's and governmental organizations which may have a relation to the cause/solution which in many cases was the Ministry of Health or Education.

[41] See Blanks Jones, 2018. Flipping the Panopticon which examines youth theatre artists' civic engagement practices both, before and during the Ebola crisis which analyzes how they navigate systems of power.

ability to establish connections for their personal and professional endeavors. Within the structure of the organization, they advance from the student level to a Junior Arts Instructor who travels outside of their home county to assist a Senior Arts Instructor with lesson planning and implementation. After two years of serving successfully in this capacity, they may apply to become a Senior Instructor who establishes their own program site with support from the organization. Finally, the theatre company has expanded in recent years to offer fee-for-service consultancies and where it is appropriate, will invite Senior Arts Instructors to participate in these paid appointments, building their capacity as researchers and trainers for artists and activists.

Youth who participate in iNGO interventions as intermediaries gain considerable skills, resources, and larger platforms to articulate their concerns. However, as demonstrated in this case, their voices are often reintegrated into the dominant discourses and agendas of other institutions. In their struggle to avoid being exploited, youth make demands about their needs using the language of benefits. Their participation is often contingent upon having specific needs met in exchange for varying levels of their work to be recuperated by larger organizations. Through these opportunities to be intermediaries for interventions, they gain knowledge, broader platforms to practice public speaking, and other supports that enable them to prioritize their own issues to a degree and have greater control of their destiny which as Michael Marmot (2015) demonstrates is paramount in closing the global health disparities gap.

Through theatre, young people air their grievances and concerns and present solutions on stage as praxis, the reflexive rehearsing of how to do these things in their

daily lives. This has direct implications for their health and for the well-being of their communities because they are able to clearly articulate the concerns that deserve attention and focus in policies and practices. This kind of empowerment facilitates their ability to access resources that sometimes provide tangible benefits in the short term, as well as, to give them greater access to the people and networks that provide larger platforms to articulate their visions for the future.

CHAPTER 4. Pedagogies of Gendering Citizenship: The role of drama in developing positive masculinities in Liberian Youth Theatre

Setting the stage: Little has changed in gender practice

The staff at our headquarters gathered to celebrate my birthday and as the power went out leaving us in the dark, the National Director, Paul, stood to give a speech before leading the Kpelle birthday song. His speech thanked me for choosing Liberia and Bong County as the National site. He thanked me for the vision and emphasized the opportunity for the Bong County site to carry it out, add their own effort and make it for themselves. He then asked the Arts Instructors who were present at the celebration to perform scenes from the first production of the Bong County site from 2013. Amazingly, they still remembered much of the script and songs they sang as first year students. Sadly, six years later, Liberia still struggles with the core issues identified in their play: access to education for girls and the sexual vulnerability they face in their attempts to receive an education. It was great to see their growth over the years from students who portrayed victims and perpetrators to instructors who write scripts for international NGOs on gender justice and teach other young people playmaking and performance.

In this particular case, I am interested in how young men's perspectives on gender roles are impacted by their involvement in arts-based activities and how they use their artistic activities to amplify an aspirational vision for their society. I explore the pedagogical aspects of theatre-making and scripting around international development projects addressing toxic masculinity to detail how youth actors might enact practices that are "genderally equal" as Senior Arts Instructor Serena elucidates in this chapter. The participation of women and girls in civic and political life is a contentious issue in

Liberia. Men who have had the privilege of decision-making in every area from the home to elected offices view contemporary discourses on women's rights as a threat to this privilege as will be further examined. Some provide examples of how men may become marginalized due to the changes in practice and policy. However, young men and boys in theatre, through collaborative theatre practice, performance, teaching and leading with young women and girls, have the opportunity to also practice new visions of masculinity by creating characters, such as fathers who value educating girls as much as they do boys, that may differ from what they have experienced in their homes, communities or seen at local and national levels of governance.

My research within informal education settings that utilize arts-based practices applies a gender lens to explore a specific instance of pursuing a collective or shared project across difference.[42] This chapter addresses my second research question, "In what ways do the performing arts create possibilities for collective work towards a shared project, and how are artists' productions made possible or constrained by the development agendas of donor organizations?" This ethnography follows a Senior Arts Instructor named John, who like many others, was exposed at an early age to the normalization of violence against girls and women, a societal norm extending from the rape culture of the civil war, as well as, the perceived subservient role of women and girls within the home and society. Taking this early exposure to normalized gender-based violence as an instance of how cycles of toxic masculinity are continued, this

[42] See also Lee, C. D. (2017). An ecological framework for enacting culturally sustaining pedagogy. Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world, 261-273.

ethnography follows performance studies scholar and anthropologist Soyini Madison's (2007) lead in identifying the substance of mutual encounters where each person experiences transformation. This ethnographic account presents one possible trajectory of co-performative witnessing[43] by which we can better understand how institutions, practices, policies and relationships may help young men "recover" as John described in an interview from the normalization of toxic masculinity and begin to work in earnest alongside of their female counterparts for more just and equitable societies. Madison (2007) argues that

> Dialogic performance as Co-performative witnessing is ultimately a political act, because it requires that we do what Others do with them inside the politics of their locations, the economies of their desires and their constraints, and, most importantly, inside the materiality of their struggles and the consequences… Our bodies are on the line as we are willfully captured in 'leaky locations' that are always already constitutive of tactical struggles, counter-publics, and centripetal pulls (p. 829).

The youth actors in this study engage in co-performative witnessing on stage as they bear the risk of sharing in each other's pain, joys, oppression and privilege. This trajectory is neither linear nor smooth but occurs in spurts and cycles as does much of human development. It also occurs in and out of relationship and tension with others. His fellow Senior Arts Instructor Serena is central to understanding to what degree transformative moments leave the stage and permeate their everyday lives reshaping the social relations that perpetuate gender-based educational and health inequities.

[43] Madison (2007) analyzes Conquergood's praxis of co-performative witnessing to elucidate three main methodological interventions: 1) coevalness or co-temporality as sharing time with Others rather than marginalizing them in fixed time such as is often perpetuated in a sharp distinction between data collection and analysis, 2) nonverbal discourses such as soundscapes are politicized through cultural performances, and 3) finding counterbalance through mutual encounters where each person experiences transformation.

This chapter focuses primarily on four mutual encounters between John and his colleague Serena which highlight the ways in which theatre arts contribute to the development of crucial bonds which may lay the foundation for shifting from identity-based to membership-based civic status.[44] Philosopher Sigal Ben-Porath (2012) offers the notion of shared fate which is not rooted in identity but in national membership that is understood as a "relational, process-oriented, dynamic affiliation that arises from cognitive perceptions as well as from preferences and actions of members" p. 383. John's struggle with changing societal norms rooted in rights-based approaches perceived as coming from the Western world is illuminated in his engagements with other actors on an interpersonal level which capture the collaborative process of script writing and the performances of their work. These processes unsettle perceptions of gender-based violence to shed light on the truth of preferences in terms of gender relations as Serena and John struggle to make meaning of genderally equal practices for themselves and national audiences.

Potential of drama for addressing gender inequality: Serious play

Audience responses to a national performance for the launch of a campaign against gender-based violence

> The stage is well-lit as is the audience. There are no special lighting effects in this hall. A man and woman enter together from stage right. They are wearing the same white T-shirt with the campaign logo boldly displayed across the front. They take seats at center stage as the mistress of ceremonies walks into the scene, passing them the microphone. They also do not have body mics so utilize their

[44] According to Ben-Porath (2012), the shift from identity-based to membership based civic status can be accomplished through "civic learning" composed of knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards government, as well as, 1) **knowledge of fellow citizens**; 2) skills to interact with them on a political and civic level, and 3) **attitudes that can facilitate shared civic action** (p. 383). Also consider Byam's assertions about process v product.

voices on the natural breath to project the sound into the hall as much as possible. Through their dialogue, in simple English, the audience soon learns that they are husband and wife, and that the husband is concerned for his daughter who is now 18 to return to school. She has not attended since her biological mother died because her mother used to take care of paying her school fees. Hearing his concerns, the wife sweetly convinces her husband that he does not need to worry about his daughter, but that together they will save money by letting the girl sell small items to earn the money to pay for school. The husband is not pleased with this solution but his wife rests her hand gently on his leg and explains that times are hard and that the daughter has "age in her favor." He defers to his wife on the matter and leaves for work. He has barely exited the stage when the wife cuts her eyes and yells forcefully for her step-daughter to come to her. The girl enters quickly with her head down, eyes low, humbly approaching her step-mother. She berates the girl using a forceful tone and demeaning language to send her to sell bananas, talking to her as though she is not capable of the simple task. She sends her from the house with the threat that if one banana is lost, she will not eat.

As the daughter walks the streets carrying her large tray or bananas on her head to market her goods, the first audience response of laughter is to cat calls from a character referred to as Uncle who makes sexual comments about her prior to calling her over asking, "Let me see the whole banana first." He circles her looking at her body and commenting aloud about how "fine" she is. She asks him to stop, reminding him that she is selling the bananas for her mother. He ceases the sexualized comments though he continues to eye her body with a smile and promises to buy from her, telling her that he will call for her to come get the money once he finds it and exits the stage. At this point, the audience again began to talk among themselves and laugh, anticipating the tragedy that will soon occur as though watching a horror movie when the character runs into the woods and the audience knows they will fall into the trap of the murderer. From his home off-stage, Uncle calls her to come get the money. The audience rings with laughter. She gathers her tray and walks into the trap.

More talking and laughter ensues throughout the audience as the characters' voice over signifies a rape. We hear the lead character repeatedly tell her perpetrator to "leave her [alone]" before her voice is muffled as though a hand had been placed over her mouth. At this point, the audience contributes more audible responses, mostly laughter. In the midst of the voice overs, items begin to enter the stage: first her lappa is thrown onto the stage from backstage as though it had been torn

> from her, then her fruit rolls onto the stage piece by piece as we hear the tray drop. By this point the audience is also clapping. There is cheering and clapping as she re-enters the stage in visible fear and pain while her perpetrator threatens her not to tell anyone lest he kill her, asserting, "didn't you enjoy the thing too?" as she quickly grabs her lappa and reties it around her waist. The audience laughs and claps again as the perpetrator exits the stage whistling.

Though it cannot be determined what the discussions among the audience members were, these initial experiences were unsettling especially in the space of a campaign launch against gender-based violence. The performance continues demonstrating that a number of factors such as lack of family support, dominant community norms around victim blaming, and lack of law enforcement resources create an impossible situation for girls to attain justice. It was followed by another drama, also written by Serena, on the same theme. This second sketch featured a female university student who is approached by a man who presents himself as a friend. He offers her a few dollars for recess and other gestures of kindness over time, eventually inviting her to lunch at his house where the same fate occurs. Only this time, with a supportive community, the young woman receives justice in the court of law.

After these performances, Serena and John discussed possible audience interpretations. Neither seemed surprised or disturbed, rather they expected the audience's responses. They posited several possibilities including that people who have not personally experienced rape do not take it seriously but understand it as entertainment because it has become a normal aspect of life in their society. According to Serena:

> Normal in a sense where the perpetrator, [once] he finished raping the girl, and he come blowing whistle, don't care. So people was like, oh that's just what happen. And it's kind of normal thing where people don't do anything about it. 'So why

> would we be so serious? In fact, it's not even truth. It's not real what they are doing'. [People] don't take seriously what happens that doesn't happen to you so they don't feel bad. And there are no consequence. It happens a lot so it's not treated seriously. So in watching it, why spend time thinking on it in a serious way? Like the woman said, there is no fair judgment so it will just continue. It will be Liberia's normal thing. (Interview with John and Serena, Oct. 22, 2019).

This scene was intentionally played off the stage to be sensitive to actors and audience members who may experience witnessing these scenes as trauma. Serena's concerns around normalization of rape raises another concern of the problematic nature of the spectacle of these kinds of performances as performance studies scholar Fred Moten (2003) discusses in relation to Hartman's (1997) literary performance which sought to disrupt the reproduction of the violent subjection of a black woman's body. Hartman's suppression of the spectacle of violence, based on Frederick Douglass's account at the whipping post being inherent to the making of the slave, implies that it is also important to consider sexual violence as central to the making of dehumanizing conceptualizations of women:

> Rather than inciting indignation, too often they immure us to pain by virtue of their familiarity— the oft-repeated or restored character of these accounts and our distance from them are signaled by the theatrical language usually resorted to in describing these instances— and especially because they reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering. ***What interests me are the ways we are called upon to participate in such scenes. Are we witnesses who confirm the truth of what happened in the face of the world-destroying capacities of pain, the distortions of torture, the sheer unrepresentability of terror, and the repression of the dominant accounts? Or are we voyeurs fascinated with and repelled by exhibitions of terror and sufferance?... Or does the pain of the other merely provide us with an opportunity for self-reflection? At issue here is the precariousness of empathy and the uncertain line between witness and spectator.*** Only more obscene than the brutality unleashed at the whipping post is

> the demand that this suffering be materialized and evidenced by the display of the tortured body or endless recitations of the ghastly and terrible. In light of this, how does one give expression to these outrages without exacerbating the indifference to suffering that is the consequence of the benumbing spectacle or contend with the narcissistic identification that obliterates the other or the prurience that too often is the response to such displays? (Hartman, 1997, p. 1-2, emphasis own)

The rape scene, even performed off-stage still stands as a restoration of an all-too-familiar event and has perhaps lost its ability to move audiences to empathy, much less action. The restoration of the rape as not an actual historically situated occurrence but as a representation of a common tragedy further displaces the performance from its originary context.[45] Moten argues that the repression of the brutality of these scenes also forces a conjunction of reproduction and disappearance; by being played off-stage the audience may experience many possibilities for the visual reproduction rather than one vision crafted by the performers. A danger lies in how this "displacement somehow both acknowledges and avoids the vexed question of the possibility of pain and pleasure mixing in the scene and in its originary and subsequent recounting" (Moten, 2003, p. 4). For example, John offered another possibility regarding the perspectives of audience members who can relate to the scene as a source of enjoyment:

> Those who were laughing were people who felt it was just entertainment and who enjoy doing it also. That's what I sensed yesterday… Most people enjoy raping! They feel that it's pleasure, seriously. In general, women were laughing, like

[45] Schechner (1981) reminds us that much of live performance, including myth and ritual, is of a "nonevent". Creating a restored event from a distant place or actual past is rarely accomplished because of changes in context: social circumstances, bodies, and beliefs change over time including the changes in the audience. According to Schechner, much of performance is a restored nonevent, as the historical record is not what actually occurred but what is encoded and performed such as "ethnographic films shot in the field and edited at home… the event restored has been forgotten, never was, or is overlaid with so much secondary stuff that its historicity is lost" (p.5).

> Serena said, they felt it was entertainment. Only those who have experienced it did not laugh because they knew that we were displaying something that happens in real life but just on the stage… I laughed when the perpetrator was saying you think I will kill cow and eat dry rice? And that's a common saying in Liberia. Like to invest, like when they were behind the stage, when he was carrying on the act. We men in Liberia, our belief, we don't invest in women if they don't turn out to us or we don't have something to do… [So when people who rape see the scene] You will, you will feel that you doing it. If you're a dancer and someone dancing, you will move to the same music enjoying it right? So if somebody usually does that, takes advantage of women, it will be like his turn to enjoy. There's no shame… In everything in life, not everyone agrees upon it at the time. Everyone has their own view. If it were played on stage, some people might feel bad, some people might still blame the girl. (Interview with John and Serena, Oct. 22, 2019)

Serena agreed with John's interpretation of the audience's response adding that even after the performance, an older woman in the hall remarked that girls are raped because of the way they dress. Serena intervened telling the woman:

> It's not a reason why men rape. They rape because they already think that women are, are people that should be molest[ed]. They are people that should be humiliated... Once that man has purposed in his heart to do that, he will do it. So you don't, it doesn't matter how you dress or what time you walk. So are you telling me that I don't have the right to wear what I want to wear? So I tried to talk her, that it was not good. It's not a good remark to make. Most especially in public places (Interview with John and Serena, Oct. 22, 2019).

John and Serena's interpretations of the audience's responses to the performance fill in some of the context surrounding the seeming disjuncture between a serious scene receiving such a playful response. Even the way the perpetrator was described on stage as being uncaring and whistling as he exited adds to the playful nature of these staged interactions that highlights a real societal injustice where perpetrators feel protected from consequence. The audience, in turn, could share in the pleasure of the perpetrator by setting this scene aside as mere entertainment, simply a play and not something to be

taken seriously as there are no real consequences to the perpetrator. On the other hand, it is the victim who suffers the consequence of pain and is thus scrutinized. The victim-blaming response of the woman Serena encountered is a common discourse worldwide when it comes to the abuse and violence suffered by women. Policies to address the cost of schooling were overlooked as a solution, with the overall campaign relying instead on an attack on culture which is not likely to change soon enough to benefit Serena and her youthful peers. In this context, policy will be slow to have any impact because of the dual governance systems of national and customary law. These instances and other experiences shared by John and Serena are evidence of the toxic masculinity that permeates society even when there are representations of strong women in leadership and politics. The bonds of sincere friendship and respect that characterize John and Serena's relationship allowing for open and honest discussion of hard truths such as John admitting to his own laughter in a scene he knew was created to build empathy allowed for a more in-depth discussion of a larger problem in society where injustices against women are considered acceptable.

The staged play, as in the performance, draws on a notion of playfulness which opens possibilities for deeper cultural understanding. Cultural historian Johan Huizinga (1938(2019)) argues that the (hu)man should be characterized by engagement in play as an element of culture. He asserts that though play is often thought of in contrast to seriousness, the totalizing effect of play in the absorption of the players can indeed become quite a serious matter which can create social groupings as the "feeling of being "apart together" in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually

withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms" (p. 12). In contrast to Huizinga's definition and using the example of improvisation in Yoruba ritual, Margaret Drewal defines "ere" as "serious play" or a tactical mode of activity that exposes one's behaviors (1989[46], p. 16). Omi Osun Joni Jones' (1993) devised improvisational performances sought to resolve a breach or rift between men and women in the African American community using this concept of serious play to replenish the "spirit of the community" (p. 236). Jones explains how this kind of play also differs from Western definitions in that "improvisation is connected to an African sense of time which gives primacy to the now" rather than focusing on limitations and offers lessons about who has power to act or speak which are important to acknowledge in efforts to bring about communal healing. Cultural anthropologist Sherry Ortner (2006) has also considered the way in which subjects navigate and improvise through power hierarchies using the idea of "serious games." Developing a theory of practice, Ortner's intervention opens an interpretation of culture based on power. Ortner asserts that individual actions work on broader systems and structures which departs from Bourdieu's concept of habitus as how structure becomes embedded in the body. Ortner's subject is agentive. Ortner understands forms of resistance at sites of tension beyond those of dominating/dominated and rather draws on the performative nature of speaking truth to power through playful means much in the same way that Jones describes the actions of her Yoruba interlocutors.

[46] This citation is from Drewal's 1989 dissertation much of which was included in her 1992 book*, Yoruba ritual: Performers, play, agency*.

A focus on the activity of the actors, including John and Serena as part of the devising process, creates an open narrative[47] where the focus is on the meaning-making process rather than defining a fixed underlying meaning.[48] In response to thinking about the role of the performance in citizenship, John shared, that the arts are helpful in everyday life in that

> The social aspect is friendship because once you and someone get on stage and you guys perform, there's a bond that builds between both of you. Because onstage you are in a different world, and in that different world whatsoever things you say to that person, it doesn't just stay on stage, it leaves and lives after you or whatever friendship you build in a very positive way" (Staff interview, July 10, 2019).

Though the performance and its response may have left many uneasy due to the play at heart of the performance's unfolding, this allowed for the performers to establish mutual bonds apart from societal norms. Thereby they became more able and equipped to both question these norms for themselves and expose these norms within their society.[49]

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[47] Closed narrative where (discourses) cut off actual aspirations, for example the rising "problem" of teenage pregnancy in Africa, again informed by a discussion similar to the development of adolescence by Durham and Cole re: production/consumption v vital conjectures "ngon-miniga (girl-woman)" (Johnson-Hanks, 2002). Also see Cati Coe's (2005) description of dramas which prescribe the solution according the state sanctioned efforts in Ghana's nation building; also much of theatre for development.

[48] E. Patrick Johnson (2003) examines the teaching of literature in performance studies classrooms in search of authentic blackness. "For those of us who teach performance of literature, the performances that occur in our classrooms are multiple: pedagogy as performance, learning as performance, texts as performance, critique as performance, and so on... the shift to ''performance studies,'' that is, the view of performance as process, contingent, historically and culturally situated, itself a text-making praxis" (p. 220). He asserts that meaning-making is developed through "a dialogical relationship among texts, students, teachers, the self, and the self as Other" (p. 221). In this expanded understanding of "text" which includes all involved in the dialogical relationship, Johnson insists that "The text performs its blackness as much as we perform it. Either way, the focus is on the meaning-making process rather than on unearthing a fixed underlying meaning" (p. 223).

[49] See Fabian (1990) for another example of serious play under political constraints and how the possibility of producing a play that could be considered subversive changes what can be included or must be left out.

“Genderally equal,” understood here as equality of biological sex, is in some ways similar “biological citizenship” which Petryna (2013) describes as "individual and collective claims to biological damage" (p. 6). While the iNGOs campaign seeks policy change and cultural change to mitigate against future harms, Serena's play seeks redress on the grounds of social membership within a sex-based biological citizenship category. As Petryna explains of post-Chernobyl Ukraine,

> "Such demands are also being formulated in the context of fundamental losses-losses of primary securities such as employment and state protections against inflation and a general corrosion of legal-political categories. Struggles over scare medical goods and over the criteria that constitute a legitimate claim to citizenship... A stark order of social and economic exclusion now coexists with a generalized discourse of human rights" (p. 6).

For Serena, redress is long overdue for fundamental losses such as employment due to culturally-engrained and state-sanctioned discrimination against women and failed state protections against gender-based violence. Further, struggles over scarce resources such as quality education intensify the damages to the female sex in constituting legitimate claims to citizenship which are the foundation of rights-based claims. Therefore, though her claim to redress through the provision of education is overshadowed, perhaps even co-opted by the iNGOs campaign agenda, Serena's alignment with foreign institutions which promote human rights discourses, which in some ways supersede national rights-based citizenship claims, creates an opportunity for her concerns to be raised in a space where she would not likely be heard otherwise.

This exchange of message for platform is part of the humanitarian branding process, as artists represent foreign messages such as this campaign against toxic masculinity and gender-based violence, to gain an audience to share their far more

nuanced concerns. Anthropologist Amal Fadlalla proposes what she has termed "routing visibilities," a feminist retracing of highly publicized narratives in Sudan, which

> "helps to discern the effect of violence on the cultural and political representations of social actors and, further, to reveal how these representations are mobilized for the construction of national and transnational identities and the production of global subjects. I suggest that these stories and their mediated visibility must be situated in the charged and critical historical moments that enable their production and shape the state of vulnerability that characterizes the ongoing competition among political actors over the meanings of rights, humanity, and transnational solidarities and affiliations. At this historical juncture, transnational feminist politics lends legitimacy to Sudanese translocal dissent politics and renders claims of co-optation relevant but insufficient for understanding the multiple struggles and competing hegemonies that are in place" (p. 188).

Whereas the iNGO aimed for mass cultural change, and to mobilize citizens to create policy change that would criminalize perpetrators, Serena's aim was far more modest and perhaps more feasible: provide financial support for girls to complete their education. If either of the female victims in her scripts had been fully supported in their schooling endeavors, they would not likely have been at risk to experience sexual violence. Serena's proposal is preventive, but requires tremendous resources for young women who have already suffered sustained damages to their quality of life. Moreover, her proposal only seeks redress for girls and young women engaged in the noble pursuit of education, carrying an underlying assumption about what kinds of girls and women's lives and health are valuable. Though the goal of this chapter is not to evaluate the potential policy solution per se, but to trace the ways in which youth artists' projects may be furthered or constrained by international NGOs, it good to note that a proposal which

urges state protection of school girls risks going down a path that harms as many as it helps.[50]

"Let me keep my respect as a man" A breakfast discussion

In Monrovia the day after both John and Serena's scripts had been performed in front of a national audience at the launch of a large international NGO campaign to end violence against women, John, Serena, my husband, baby, and I sat down for breakfast at one of the nicest hotel restaurants in the country. It is Lebanese-owned and newly remodeled serving cuisine from all over the world. John and Serena tried items like bacon that they had never seen before. When we started to discuss the events of the previous day, John described his process of wrestling with the incorporation of his own views upholding the privileged societal status of men within the script and with writing according to the gender equality goals of the international NGO consultancy which hired the theatre company Arts Instructor team for this project.

> John:
> When I first heard about the gender issue, it was, it was just, the same old talk in my ear, but I never felt the way other [who are] females, might feel, if they have been assaulted. So I was just writing from the concept, 'Oh yeah, they are female. They need respect.' But I wasn't feeling the way another [who is] female might feel until when I got the deeper understanding of the gender issue. I, in my own mind, I changed myself into like a female and started thinking if I was a female and I've been assaulted, how should I feel? So every time you writing a script you got to put yourself in the position of the character. If it's the villain. You got to put yourself in the villain form. If you are a hero, you got to put yourself as a writer, in the hero's form. So that's how I got the script done. So I had to like change or impersonate a female in my mind and feel how female might feel before I started writing. So it was hard... You've got to feel what others might feel. You got to put us in a position of other people but as an instructor writing a play for someone

[50] Several scholars have documented the sneaky ways that respectability is inserted into policy to further disenfranchise those who are already marginalized through the policy environment. Cházaro, A. (2015). Beyond Respectability: Dismantling the Harms of Illegality. Harv. J. on Legis., 52, 355. Phipps, A. (2009). Rape and respectability: Ideas about sexual violence and social class. Sociology, 43(4), 667-683.

you just write and leaves with whosoever character to portray that but in writing a script for this project, I had to be the character. I had to be the instructor, I had to be the perpetrator. It was hard, seriously.

Serena:
Like, the gender aspect. I don't think that when God created men and women, it said that you, you are different from this person. You are different. He said, let's make man in our own image. So that's why, both men and women are the same, it doesn't matter the sex because we are both human. We have to do things equally. No matter people's [gender] because who knows? I can be a female and I have a husband who eh, maybe one way or the other is down and I can be up so should I be the same way that they think as a man? If a woman is down, should I maltreat them? No, I will also act like a woman because even though I'm providing for the house but I will always have it at the back of my mind that he's my husband so I will do what I'm supposed to do and he will do what he supposed to do. We're both gonna work equally in one accord… So there's no thing that will say that we are not equal, when it comes to the, our gender, so I disagree of gender violence against women. We are genderally equal.

John:
And as she was saying, when I was writing the script, I was like, ah, you mean, I should make female equal to me? So like it was kind of hard, and I wasn't able to agree and then disagree. So the script, at first it was like one side I was writing, but I said, let me keep my respect as a man in this script so that uh, whose ever character that is playing it should portray to the audience that maybe men should share with women, but we men, we are men, we should keep that. So it wasn't in between, in between when the first script they said no, we are speaking on violence. So that's how I changed it but it was hard for me to just decide and say women and men are equal, but later when I understood the context and I understood how other women felt. So that's how I got the concept and that was...

Serena
Yeah, to really admit what John is saying, myself I saw it when he was writing the script. He was in, he always come to me, "ah Serena, when you write one line for… how would this be possible?"

Me:
Like what?

Serena:
Yeah, like where the positive side, where the man was like frying an egg and then the wife said ‘please don't burn the egg,’ but then the man was, is the one who's supposed to say, ‘please don't burn the egg’ (laughter) then why would the woman be telling him ‘please don't burn the egg’? ‘Am I your cook?’ I was like,

> no, John, what you are doing now you have to put gender inequality on one side because what we are talking here now you have to put yourself in the shoe. If you were a female and your husband matches you, how will you feel? Put yourself in that kind of character. Then he said yes, it's truth. I then I said I think you are getting there right now because if you can't do the right thing then what are you to tell others, if you cannot get it right?

The tensions in writing John faced show how he developed empathy for women and girls as a creative and imaginative struggle. Through character development as a playwright, he was placed in the uncomfortable position of shifting his perception from merely recognizing that the international discourse on women's rights required that he write about having respect for women to actually placing himself into the interior world of girls and women as he imagined their responses to assault. He described this as a difficulty with which he consulted with Serena where his own efforts to become the character and make these cognitive and emotional shifts fell short. The body can only stretch so far and this may limit the power of imagining oneself as another. Serena's knowledge of John's own perception and of dominant views in society is apparent as she addresses religion, equality of the sexes as genderally equal, and gender roles around provision. Her deep knowledge of John as the other is on display as she uses examples from their theatre work and everyday life to lift the possibility of men and women being on one accord challenging John to implement in his everyday life what he has designed to be expressed on the stage. She implored him to lead by example extending their performance encounters into the realm of pedagogy and aiding their mutual transformations towards shared citizenship.

Politics of representation: Powerful Mothers

> So there's no need for us to say, Oh man, you are not allowed to cry that's how most of the time they can say, women are weak vessel. Who told you that some women are not stronger? What will you say about Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf? Is she a weak vessel? No. What will you say about MacDella Cooper, is she a weak vessel? No, these are all strong women. So there's no need that men will say that women are weak vessel. We have to stand on the ground to fight this. Women are not weak vessel and we have to be genderally equal. [Serena, interview, July 20, 2019]

In November 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, "Liberia's Iron Lady" became the first elected woman president in Africa, serving as a role model of female leadership in governance for most of the childhood and adolescent years of the youth civic actors in this study. Known for her strength as a woman who was able to transition Liberia from war to peace, her presidency is part of a growing trend of national, regional, and global women's movements where African women increasingly have greater political representation (Tamale, 2018; Kassa & Serakakis, 2019; Adams, 2008; Bauer, 2009, VanAllen, 2001). Having more public trust than men for major political transitions especially in post-conflict contexts, African women, and Johnson-Sirleaf in particular, serve as a symbol of competent and moral leadership and commitment to change. For example, early in Johnson-Sirleaf's administration, she addressed anti-corruption as a leading cause of poverty, ensured that there were more women recruited and trained in policing and the military, and supported economic investment in women's business and education.

These policy shifts under her leadership have encouraged women and girls in Liberia to take on political leadership from local to global levels and invest in their own

education and training to find their way out of poverty and bring about greater equality with men (Mikell, 2009; Adams, 2008). Many of the post-conflict gains in women's participation have been furthered by international peace-building and development efforts which challenge gender roles as young women in particular align with international discourses (Fuest, 2008). However, several scholars (Moran, 2012; Oyěwùmí, 2016; VanAllen, 2006) have pointed out that Johnson-Sirleaf's election was made possible by a longer history of powerful women leaders in African history. VanAllen (2006) argues that essentialized visions of gender from Western conceptualizations of motherhood inadequately characterizes understandings of gender in precolonial Africa where mothers are viewed as powerful providers who guide their children and control the affairs of even adult children and their daughters-in-law. She conceptualizes this form of extended kinship power as "embodied citizenship" which is part of a dualism in symbolic political leadership of African women. In this way, the common references to "Ma Ellen" drew on longer legacies of powerful women in the African context.

However, strong local and national claims of international imposition on local culture are not surprising as Johnson-Sirleaf's presidency introduced large flows of international aid and expertise to the reforming of systems and structures impacting the government and countless civil society organizations encouraging gender mainstreaming which has recently come under greater critique (Kunz, 2020). Communications studies scholar Stillion Southard (2017) argues that Johnson-Sirleaf's rhetorical leadership fostered a cosmopolitan citizenship defined in practice as "a performance of belonging to multiple communities, insofar that, as citizens engage local and national initiatives and

programs, they craft what it means to belong in ways that can contribute to the wellbeing of regional and global communities" with a particular focus on supporting transnational feminist goals (p. 397). This fostering in of international norms such as women and girls being educated, politically engaged and able earners, delineated the *what* and *how* of cosmopolitan citizenship practice. These rhetorical strategies garnered more international support and aided national policy changes which reshaped gender dynamics – a key point of contention between those who support reforms based on essentialist views of gender in Africa, and those who aspire for citizenship practices which encompass the wider war-affected population.

Not only have women and girls been burdened with the trauma and loss of property, financial means and dignity, but men and boys who were not ex-combatants face similar losses and have been left out of programs and policies that address those who consider themselves as victims of the war (Utas, 2011). International Development scholar Tanya Ansahta Garnett (2016) noted an increase in resentment among younger men who reported feeling marginalized as gender efforts are perceived to result in uneven societal benefit, stating that the Ministry of Gender's programs focus mainly on women only recently adding adolescent girls. A briefing on women's dialogues post-conflict highlighted the work of a national umbrella organization for women engaged in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process who expressed that "similar dialogues of healing should be held for the men, because men also suffered and because they would not stop violence against women until they were healed" (Pillay, Speare & Scully, 2010, p. 92). However, other scholars raise concerns that Johnson-Sirleaf's failure to increase political

representation in subsequent elections by backing legislation that moves towards gender parity among other policy gaps that would produce safer educational environments for girls such as the passing of the domestic violence law have contributed to maintaining patriarchal systems that reinforce poor quality of life for girls and women (Pailey & Williams, 2017). Tensions over these political shifts since the end of the war may result in continued aggression towards girls and women.

Thus, female youth are placed precariously between girls needing protection and women demanding rights as they embody elements of both and a unique in-betweenness. Along with their male counterparts, they are impacted by various policies and practices which include and exclude them in different ways, not only due to their age but their social context. Historicizing the development of the category of adolescence, Cole and Durham (2007) demonstrate that a convergence of culturally-specific forces aligned to concretize the need to understand adolescence as a separate category from childhood and adulthood:

> During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, new ideas about childhood and adolescence were shaped by a complicated network of changes: transformations in the organization of production and consumption, ***shifts in women's political and professional voices***, the rise of new disciplines in the academy, and the growing impact of consumerism. Taken together, these created an increasing gap between the possibilities of physical reproduction and social reproduction, a gap we have come to refer to as adolescence. (emphasis own, p. 6).

Recent shifts that have impacted not only the way gender-based rights discourses are embedded in policies, but also in the social, economic and political dynamics that have shaped the youth or adolescent experience necessitate an understanding of how young people's own agency impacts the ways they navigate their world. Mats Utas's (2005)

ethnography of a young woman's trajectory through the war demonstrates that young women are not mere victims but are agentive in developing the social relationships that enable them to live the lives that they find to be of value. His notion of 'victimcy' (a portmanteau which incorporates 'victim' and 'agency') describes staging oneself as a victim as a tactic for social navigation of warzones. The performative nature of these navigations is also apparent in how gender is constituted. Judith Butler's (1988; 2004; 2011) critical intervention differentiated itself from previous work on theories of gender by providing a theory of how gender is constituted rather than merely performed (Cameron, 1998; Jackson, 2003; Schlichter, 2011; Miller, 2010). Performative acts which shape what gender is for young Liberians have been informed by the multiple and varied experiences with the social, economic and political shifts national and internationally which have transpired since the war and subsequent election of former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and also their own understandings of traditional African conceptualizations of gender which may be misinformed by essentialized histories re-presented to Liberian youth from the Western world (Oyěwùmí, 1997).

"Recovering" from toxic masculinity

> John:
> …you know uh the society some of us grew up in, as male. We always have higher authority in the home. So when I was writing about the gender topic, I was feeling cheated actually to share my right equally with woman. It was hard for me. So usually, the mentality we men have here is that gender business is from the West and they are trying to pollute our culture so I was like in between of my culture and Western culture. It was very difficult for me up till now. Sometime some facts about gender, I, I deny that. I, I, I don't usually see it as uh fair. So it was really difficult. It was difficult... I'm really, I'm actually feeling a difference with positive, different way towards women. But first, my thinking was somehow negative to women because I didn't take them as my equal and even, she can tell, (gestures to Serena) when I was in school, both of us were in school together,

> women never really have much voice in my, in the class we were in. I used to be always up up up up. She was the president of the school, but she was kind of down because it wasn't easy for her. She had a lot of male competitors to deal with in the school, so sometimes she would just like some how want to cry. So maybe that's the difference. Back then I had negative thinking about women, after going through this project I'm recovering.

John's comments here highlight the tensions of feeling that the gender-based ideologies embedded in recent policies and practices are a Western imposition to what he understands as authentic African culture. Due to this and his shifting perception, he feels that he is caught in-between cultures as he 'recovers' from toxic masculinity. Yet, he still sees it as optional to "share" his right with women to encourage interactions, practices, and through his theatre advocacy, policies, that are genderally equal. Though he describes a tension here between two different ways of thinking, it is quite possible that this is only a cognitive tension that he has come to understand through embodied practice. Yet as surely as theatre practitioners can put an emotion onto their bodies, they can remove it. Perhaps these are the ways John strategically navigates his tensions with the "gender topic," as a trickster[51] who can move across and through Conquergood's (1985) performative stances, appearing to align with the ethical dimension that will allow him to advance on his own terms. He may use the tools of theatre to tear down the very house where he learned them if he does not feel that it serves him.

Through tension between himself and Serena, who forces John towards dialogical performance and genuine conversation, John began to respect their gender differences

[51] The trickster figure in African folklore is most readily known for his wit and deceit, greatly popularized by the spider Anansi, who accomplished what he could not do own his own by strategically interacting with others to attain what he could not get on his own.

and explore how to perform difference through the body in the process of meaning making. Drawing on Babcock's "performative reflexivity" (Babcock, 1977), Turner & Schechner understand performance as a work of art where the "same person(s) are both subject and object... The "self" is split up the middle- it is something that one both is and that one sees and, furthermore, acts upon as though it were another... acting upon the self-made-other in such a way as to transform it" which might be singular or collective" (p. 25). Boys exposed to GBV may indeed be "split up the middle"- at once of the culture and Other – in a different world on stage or in the life of the creative mind as they craft new possibilities for a just society. These performance moves provided an avenue for anthropology to engage in the complexity of culture beyond supposedly objective binaries such as essentialized conceptualizations of gender or clearly demarked culture.

Serena continues the discussion by describing her own transformations into a cosmopolitan citizen as she navigated the toxic masculinity associated with her campus elections. Her "rubbing elbows" with her male peers required that she be supported with resources and connections beyond the affordances of policies promoting education for girls.

> Serena:
> Ms. Jasmine, even in Liberia, in our Liberian setting, like for what he was saying, when I was contesting as president for my school, I was kind of being cheated because they say that I was a female and I was not going to be strong and besides, I cannot make it so there's no need for them to give me power. Yeah. And the way you feel of the man because he said he's strong. He had money and all kinds of things. I was like, what I'm going to do now, and sometimes Ms. Jasmine it's true. It's good to be connected. Yeah. Because of the connection I have. I didn't have money, but people were there to pay for my campaign money. People were there to register my party, people were there to pay whatsoever on campaign day. I didn't, I didn't pay a cent. Yeah. Because of the connection.

John:
Because you were connected and educated.

Serena:
Because of the connection I had. Yes, it is. It's true.

John:
(says something quietly to Serena in disagreement)

Serena:
It's true *(firmly).* You, you, you can be educated, but one thing I know we have to do with our Liberian system, once you are educated, and you are not connected, it is very difficult. It will be difficult for you to get what you want. Yeah. So most especially we look at the connection side. Like for example, if I was not connected to you [Ms. Jasmine], I am educated, but if I was not connected to you, I couldn't come here.

John:
That's what I said educated.

Jasmine:
Here to [restaurant]?

Serena:
Yeah. I couldn't be here today.

Jasmine:
Why not?

Serena:
In [restaurant]. Because what? I may not have the finance. I'm educated, but I may not have the way to get the finance or I may not be able to even try to get here. How would I know to get here when I don't even know about this place?

Jasmine:
That's true.

Serena:
So it's through connection. That, at least I can boast. Yes, I've been to [name of venue], I've been to [hotel restaurant], All of those things. I meet people is through connection. Even as I'm speaking, because of connections, I know people know me abroad, that I don't know. Yeah. So is actually good to be connected, so being a woman doesn't mean that you cannot do what man can do. So to me women are even stronger than men. For me, I'm stronger than him. I'm stronger

> than John. At times, he give up. At times he actually give up. I have to encourage him. It's true. Don't deny the facts (directed at John with laughter and pointing). It's true. That's what you always do, put your hands like that (makes fists). Myself, I can put my hand too. I say yes, I'm strong too. I'm a strong female so it doesn't matter my gender. Yeah.

Here, Serena's determination to make her point in the conversation is a clear indicator of her constant battle with John to be heard on her own terms. He continuously insists that he understands her triumph within her campus election to be a result of the fact that she is educated though she says several times that it is instead due to her connections and, as he continues to push, to her own strength and determination which sees describes is greater than his. Though Stillion Southard (2017) has demonstrated the way in which girls' education in Liberia has been used as a rhetorical strategy of Johnson-Sirleaf to redefine gender norms through cosmopolitan citizenship, Serena has directly engaged with the policies and practices that have been put in place as a result of these rhetorical moves. In addition to the education she has received, she has built connections locally, but as she emphasizes also internationally that have aided her financially and in terms of broadening the platform by which she is known as a 'strong female'. These are the contestations and struggles that became common to the interactions between Serena and John- the difficult moments John described earlier which challenged his ability to write against his own interest as a male and to "share [his] right equally with woman." Serena entering her campus political sphere is a common trajectory for young men in Africa that often leads to political futures (Strong, 2017), but Serena's contestation on the basis of gender and her persistent pursuit with the aid of connections draws on principles of gender mainstreaming as discussed in the previous section. She does not credit her political

prowess to the men in her life being a support but to a universal or international system of support, both ideologically and financially which may be attributed to the gender mainstreaming work of international development organizations and national women's organizations' furtherance of rights-based political initiatives.

Anthropologist Paulla Ebron uses examples from her work in Ghana and Senegambia and the work of Schroeder[52] on international development to demonstrate that "subjects use gender performance as a way of explaining social dilemmas more generally, dramatically illustrating how performance creates social divisions, conflicts and communities" (Ebron, 2007, p. 187). Here, performance and performativity are blurred analytic categories which are fruitful for theories on gender. In Serena's case, gender tensions increase as she takes political space on campus, performing new visions of women's political leadership. However, as neither wife nor mother, she is still perceived as a girl- needing protection and care rather than able to provide care and guidance. Thus she rejects the trope of women as a weak vessel by invoking images of powerful African women political role models to support her own aspirations. With the remaining positive discourses on female leadership and citizenship available to her, she relies on more recent shifts in the status of women and the role models of strength seen in recent women political leaders who are also "powerful mothers" (VanAllen, 2009, title). Therefore, she enacts embodied citizenship by drawing on African models rooted in

[52]In Schroeder's ethnography on development, he describes gender tensions as women take on second (and more preferred) "husbands"- gardens that bring in greater cash flow than the farms of first husbands who are angered when their wives spend time tending to their gardens instead of domestic needs (Ebron, 2007,p. 185). Schroeder learns of these concepts as part of the everyday, animated discussions among groups of women and men, told as stories.

kinship[53] and simultaneously accessing rights-based foreign ideologies and support as a cosmopolitan citizen.[54] Through these performances of gender, read pedagogically, people learn that women can be sustained by their own labor, including political success, in ways that may promote equal citizenship rights.

> Through their conflictual gender performances, they hoped not only to establish livelihood practices that would benefit them but also to teach villagers—both men and women—a better vision of village life. Development, indeed, was pedagogical, but not perhaps as its international agents had intended (Ebron, 2007, p. 186).

Postulating that her contexts allow for a starting point for thinking gender to lie in the realm of pedagogy rather than nature, Ebron highlights rhetorical and pedagogical dramatic everyday life performances of gender in West Africa in hopes of extending the Western men/women binary to include other forms of difference which may reveal important information about social obligations such as class and kinship. By focusing on this blurred zone between performativity and performance, Ebron (2007) challenges the notion of performative acts as those which occur "naturally" and posits as a non-site specific theoretical intervention insight to Bourdieu's question on the habitus as naturalizing gender relations in the West (p. 176, 187).

Dwight Conquergood (1989) describes the way in which ethnographers have focused on reflexive genres where the ambiguity of self and society allows for an exploration of how both are socially and creatively constructed.[55] In an interview, John

[53] See VanAllen's (2009) "powerful mothers"
[54] See Stillion Southard, 2017.
[55] The performance turn developed out of post-positivism and seeks to reconstruct self and society.

reflected on how he understands the role of theatre in the development of youth as citizens:

> Young people become better citizens through their profession of the arts by taking into consideration every little knowledge they have been taught in the theatre morally and to apply these things in their society, that boils down to me for the gender aspect. I'm one person who thinks that females should always, we are always above them. But when I got in the organization and being part of many gender workshops, everything like that. I got to learn that we should share everything duties and responsibilities, in not just the home but the society as a whole. Men should care for women we should respect women. The more you care for a girl or a woman, the more respect she will have for you. And the more the peace will last. So peace is not just no violence passed around but peace come from the home. Once every home is peaceful, between a man and a woman, every child in that home will learn the same thing and they will pass it along for generations to come.[56] (Staff interview, July 10, 2019).

John's views are informed by his multiple roles as a former theatre student and performer who now is a Senior Arts Instructor for the program. He wrote a script about peace in the home that was performed as part of a campaign against gender-based violence which was a heightened moment in his transformation on his gender journey. After the performance of his script, women who had been victims of gender-based violence gave testimonies that he said really affected him. Though in writing the script, he had attempted to place his own mind and through imagination, even his body, into the circumstances faced by women who endure domestic violence, hearing their stories confirmed the pain of the violence that he had not only mirrored in his drama but altered. He made these atrocities alive with possibilities of peace in his script. As he and Serena discuss in the opening of

[56] This was a major discourse circulating in Liberia. I even saw a bumper sticker saying something similar about a peaceful home. Also, theatre company National Director structured a training around issues in the home back in October or November 2018. These messages appeared on signs, bumper stickers, etc sponsored by government and NGOs.

this chapter even a debate on who should not “burn the egg” as a quotidian experience which does not center violence can be a starting point to opening up dialogue on gender roles and the possibility of young men recovering from generational cycles of violence against girls and women.

Routing the story of gender-based violence in Liberia through John’s perspectives of African masculinity reveal the complexities of local and global approaches to addressing gender norms and protections for women and girls. John’s attempt to access the interiority of his female characters causes him to rely on Serena’s own lived experience as co-performative witnessing. Their interactions, understood pedagogically, form a foundation for employing a performance epistemology, “how one knows has everything to do with ‘‘rubbing elbows’’ with the Other” (Johnson vis-à-vis Trudier Harris, 2003, p. 229). John and Serena’s performance pedagogies as learned from the theatre company include training in physical theatre which focuses on sourcing and sensing a range of emotions in the body. As they develop characters, they must process where in the physical body various emotions are generated and experienced. Rehearsals have given actors space to explore whether the emotion joy is generated in the chest or experienced in the feet and legs, for example. Therefore, when John attempts to enter the interior world of the female characters he creates, he pulls from the gendered social and political difference experienced in his interactions with Serena but also his similar experiences of embodied and sensory emotion.

Even My Pekin Has a Donkey and the Power to Say No

Back at the breakfast table John recounts an incident where he thought he would be jailed. Though it was months later, his hands were tense and eyes wide with stress as he spoke.

John:
You see the iPad I'm holding? *He asks looking at Jasmine. She look at the worn Amazon fire tablet she had given the Arts Instructors so that they could take photos of their classes and produce their reports.*

John:
Girls love this iPad. As soon as they see this, they say 'Aahhh!' *Smiling to himself.*

Jasmine:
Turning towards her husband who sits beside her listening.
You see this foolishness? I gave the boy the thing so he can work and he's here talking about the girls love it.

Serena:
But hear the scenario.

John:
I was at the shop drawing, I was doing a sketch and a girl came up crying, not really with tears but she was sad. She asked other people to credit her 3000 Liberian dollars *($15 US dollars)*, that her school fees were not paid, and her mom was out of the county so she needed to pay it and that way she could do her test.

Serena leans in excited with anticipation. She seems to have heard this from him before.

John:
The person help her, when her mom comes, she will pay the person back. That was my first time ever seeing that girl since I came to town (Monrovia). So she went around, asked everyone, "Oh no no no. No money." They don't know her. So I took the courage, I was drawing. She never asked me. I call her, I say "Come. What you say?" She explained; I had similar thing as her. I never had the money.

My big brother who sat next to us, I went to him to borrow the money. He said, "But you brought anything for collateral?" I said, "No, I not got money but I'm expecting to get money soon because I was doing contract." He says, "OK, then leave something to show." I say, "OK. Hold this," extending the tablet. "I will give it to you." So he held it and I gave the 3000 [Liberian dollars] to her."

Jasmine:
Interrupting with eyebrows raised as she points to the tablet.
This thing I gave you?

John:
Justifying his actions as Serena and Jasmine's husband begin to laugh.
My brother...

Jasmine:
You let someone… You don't collateral something that's not belonging to you.

John:
He starts to stammer.
Y- yes. I…

Jasmine:
Shaking her finger at him and the tablet.
I will seize it oooo.

John:
I am just explaining to you…. Something that…

Jasmine:
Sternly and sharply.
I will seize it! *Serena continues laughing louder*. You can't collateral something that not belonging to you.

John:
No, that's what I'm saying though. Ms. Jasmine, that's my experience. *Under his breath, hesitantly.* B4 is about having experience.

Serena:

Jumps in excitedly, still chuckling.
Experience! Haha.

John:
And that was the same time you came and wanted to send me to Sis. Josephine. I had to free that thing.

Jasmine:
Assertively.
And you were hiding.

John:
Firmly answering.
No. I free it by then.

Serena:
He was supposed to go borrow from another place. *Still laughing.*

John:
I free it when we were supposed to go to Sis. Teresa area. I was in that problem when I went there. So when it happen, I gave that money to her. She went. I never had no interaction with her. So the next day, the number she gave me, I called. I said, 'Oh the money. I need the money cause I have to free the iPad and I'm going to meet my boss lady.

Jasmine purses her lips and gently shakes her head; John knows it irritates her to be described in this way as his "boss lady." He would be equally perturbed if she referred to him as her "pekin" a term of endearment for someone she looks out for of a lower status. The organization intentionally uses a flat model of shared leadership. However, situating himself as a worker with a boss creates a hierarchy that invokes urgency.

John:
'If she don't see it with me, she will ask me.' Not knowing that's her mother speaking. And her mother said, 'Who is this?' I said, 'John. You can't remember me? I the one that gave you the 3000 that you would pay back.' I explain everything that happen, she said ok. 'OK, then I will pay you the money tomorrow.' Day broke, going to see my money and the girl coming, that was her

mother before her. Walking. O Ma *[old mother]* asked me, I explain you the one who gave the money to my daughter? I say yes. 'Why?' Because I have sympathy. I understand financial difficulties and also, I'm a student. I went to school. I know how student feels when you go to school and they put you out because you don't have the money and you'll do anything to get it. So her mother sensed it on the negative. She said then I must be the girl boyfriend that give her the money. Or I wanted to do something to her to get her. I said, how would I be so mean to do such thing? The lady called straight central…

Jasmine:
Breathes in sharply with surprise.
Oooo!

John:
Yes, she called central *(police).* They went to put me inside that very day. So when I went and called my mom, she talked to her. She said, 'Your son, what he's saying is a lie. How you not know somebody from anywhere, just take loan 3000 this kind of hard time, you giving it to some person. He and my daughter loving *(are sexually intimate),* yes in fact, my daughter is a virgin. I going to check her and if she's in life *(sexually experienced),* he will go to jail. So I sat down to the house, I cried, I retired there. She called the policeman but no service on a Saturday. So he said they should take me to prison first before we discuss anything. Ah, it wasn't easy. That was the worst encounter I ever had… So I went through that and later she found out I was innocent. She only told me later, she said I must write promissory note. Before she could say 'write' I finished with it. The promissory note, that I would never get close to her anywhere…

Jasmine:
Interrupting, appalled.
They should be writing you promissory note: 'I will not accuse you of something wrong!'

John:
No, that's what she said. That I should write promissory note [that] I don't have anything to do with her daughter. The day she see me around, I should go to jail. Before she even finish, I wrote it, I give it… I was so scared. I didn't even know… To this day, they haven't paid the money… And to this day when I hear people saying rape, I can always think, Is this true?

It is easy for an accusation of this nature to cause real damage. DNA testing is rarely an option to provide evidence, if ever. And in an environment where violence and rape of girls and women is considered normal, it becomes that much easier to make a false accusation because most times such accusations are true. In the end, it was violence that kept him out of jail. He shared that the mother only came to know of his innocence because she literally beat the truth out of her daughter; she flogged her until the daughter admitted that all she knew about him was that his name was John.

Knowing this story, Serena was patient with John as he attempted to work through his own trauma to understand how to write from the view of a character who actually endures the hurt and humiliation of sexual violence. Beyond creating rupture through establishing the difference of the Other, Johnson (2003) encourages "embodiment as a way of knowing" (p. 230). What John knows from these experiences is not necessarily true to the interior world of girls and women who may see performances of his work, but experiencing these ruptures in falling short of understanding and developing a believable character, led him and his fellow actors to mutual transformations towards shared citizenship. When performers respect the difference of the Other and explore possibilities for performing these differences, their own bodies engage in a meaning making process that has "political and social implications for transforming the world" (Turner, 1988, p. 244). This is the entelechy of cultural performance whereby the potential of the social world is staged (Turner, 1988). By performing difference, the social constructedness of text becomes evidently apparent and "the body also becomes a site of discursive

signifying practices that simultaneously dismantles hegemonic notions" as borders are blurred between race, gender, class and sexual identity (Turner, 1988, p. 244).

As John and Serena write, they improvise practicing lines and the physical gestures that may accompany them. John often exaggerates the way women "talk" with their hands when playing female characters. Fully convinced that there are fundamental and enduring differences

between men and women, he wavers between Conquergood's (1985) "Skeptic's Cop-Out" which is characterized by cynicism or stony silence and "Curator's Exhibitionism" marked by its sensationalism, some might say fetishization, when portraying female characters through embodied improvisation and on the page. He only ever approaches the dialogical performative in his genuine conversations with Serena who uses her knowledge of him to challenge him to be better. As they wrote, she reminded him that he was not always so innocent describing the way he preens about showing off fresh new hair cuts and attracting young girls with his high-tech devices. He laughs and admits that it's true, taking out his small comb to give shape to his brush cut. He describes how the girls come around him.

> John:
> 'Oh John, I like your hair,' they say. Just anything to come near you. Here in our context, we will call them a donkey.
>
> *Jasmine, thinking she misheard him, asks him to explain.*
>
> John:
> *Matter-of-factly.*
> A donkey. It's just some kind of name we give to girls who anything you want from them, they will do it. You can call them anytime, tell them come, they will come. No question.

Serena:
Shrugs as though to acknowledge it as an uncomfortable truth.
But what if it was you? How would you feel?

John:
Ah, it couldn't be me.

Serena:
Because you are a male.

John:
Assuredly.
Well, yes because I am a male. Well, actually, there was once. This older woman who wanted me to come around that she would be spending money on me, but I couldn't do it. No.

Serena:
Nodding towards John.
Because you wanted to be in control and then you would not be able to control her.

John:
Hmmn.

I was struck by the ease with which he navigated these various interactions with girls and women in ways that served him- his boss lady, his donkey, an older woman, and his colleague who he says he thinks of as a sister. I also wondered how much of this conversation was a performance for me to demonstrate how much he had changed on the issue of gender in the hope of securing other opportunities to earn money and gain recognition for script writing. Serena certainly didn't give him nearly as much credit as he gave himself, but she seemed determined to make him face the reality of his own role in oppressing women.

John has to navigate his own views which are far from receptive of these narratives that come from foreigners as is obvious even in the terminology of "toxic

masculinity" but also in his view as much of the national politics on gender is perceived. Serena on the other hand has a personal stake in these discourses which promote the ability of girls and women to thrive that has been politically constrained prior to the Sirleaf presidency. It is interesting to note, that these are the political remnants of the Sirleaf presidency that are politically contentious under Weah and are championed by the iNGO community and many local NGOs. In some ways, John is then representative of this political tension as emblematic of the change in political administrations. His struggles, which he describes as recovering from toxic masculinity, are perhaps less about an actual psychological struggle than one of navigating his own co-optation of language and ways of being (performance) that allow him to be strategic about opportunities to lift a counter-narrative even in the space of supporting, and gaining financial support from, iNGOs. His struggle to understand how to write these characters humanizes them, makes them relatable, and admits to the broad acceptance of gender-based violence and inequality socially. His struggles are an example of how theatre, uniquely from other kinds of shared projects, holds up a mirror to society in some instances and presents possibility for change in others. Theatre-making requires a deep interrogation of self and society that aims to build different social perceptions. This socio-cultural level goal of change (or holding up a mirror) is a civic project.

The gradual transformation in John's perception was assisted by his peer relationship with Serena which enabled him to write against his own male interest and develop a deeper sense of empathy with girls and women. This mutual encounter demonstrates that playmaking and playwriting create opportunities for young people to

experience sharing power and to question their views and beliefs that hinder an aspirational vision for society across gender difference. This is performative co-witnessing. The creation of theatre requires these kinds of negotiations among those who differ in gender identity but share a common purpose.

John and Serena's mutual transformations constitute "attitudes that can facilitate shared civic action" (Ben-Porath, 2012, p. 383). Thus, social ties are created that are an emotional form of attachment between citizens yet not reliant on identity. In this way, the civic body, as ties between individuals, subgroups and governance structures, is constantly negotiated through "engaging individuals and groups in the continuous process of designing, expressing, and interpreting membership in the nation" thereby sustaining their shared political project (p. 382). Ben-Porath places strong emphasis on social ties, however moving the concept of citizenship from identity-based to membership-based grants civic status by virtue of one's relation to others and the nation-state as a project.

"The boys wouldn't help" from rehearsal to the home

John's struggles within the theatre creation process not only challenged his beliefs but how he enacts his changing beliefs in his home life. The internal norms and structures of the theatre company also contribute to the development of new ways of behaving that sometimes stand in contrast to accepted gender norms in society and at the household level. John's transformation from a person who staunchly upheld his 'right' as a man to not have women considered as equals to becoming an advocate for fairer treatment for his own sisters is captured in one of these mutual encounters of a regular day in the theatre company:

The powdery dust from the concrete floor hadn't settled from all of our movement in the morning dance class as we all lounged, bodies draped like thick stage curtains, wilted on tilted rude wooden classroom benches and chairs at the local community school. Serena, holding the most senior standing among her instructional peer group, returned weighted with a large bowl, serving utensils, plates and complaints: "The boys wouldn't help". This was the latest iteration of an all-too-common tension in our organization around the gendered nature of food preparation and serving. I suggested that since the guys didn't carry the heavy items "like men should", then perhaps she shouldn't serve the guys first as women "should". Accustomed to my Western worldview, John immediately sprung into argument mode offering some insight on how things are done in Africa. Here, I should explain that John has never let me forget when he was forced to cook for himself and others when I placed him at a site away from his community, or when all of the instructors had to serve the students including the girl students; this was not according to custom. Nevertheless, after his lengthy explanation, he made a great show of declaring that he would gladly eat last and even serve the female instructors in the room, making a grand bow as he presented his younger sister, also an instructor, with her own bowl. As he rises from his humble position, their eyes meet and they both laugh along with a cacophony of delight and jest from our fellow actors; performance is how we make room for diverse perspectives in the theatre.

These genderally equal practices even spilled over into John's home life. His mother explained that one thing she likes about B4 is that it "makes children to be

responsible" and "it makes the girl child to know their responsibility in the house." She continued to describe how the children feel about the organization.

> "They take allll of their time with B4 because they love B4 this time even more than their houses, more than their home. So if you tell them to do anything [such as chores], once that day they are going for B4 practice, they can't do anything for you. They will just say, 'I wan go for B4. I wan go for B4 practice.' And when they come back with the result, I can be happy… It can make them to appear and behave responsible… It makes them to associate themselves with others. These are the benefits… In my house, John was the one who divided work in my house… John fixed schedule that's on my wall. You are responsible to wash dishes. You are responsible to sweep. You are responsible to cook. That's how we shared the work... He made them to shoulder their own responsibilities."

Both, boys and girls in her home had rotating housework on a schedule that was put in place by John. Though she herself alludes to believing in specific gender roles where women and girls bear a greater workload for maintaining the home, she defers to her oldest son living in the house and allows for the work to be shared. I visited their home in July of 2019 to photograph his mother's university graduation party. She had just earned her degree from the most prestigious private university in the country, and there were easily 200 people gathered to celebrate. As the rain would come and go, they had a large blue tarp setup with chairs for people to avoid getting wet, but many risked being "beat" by the rain to dance among their friends. Music blasted from large speakers powered by a rented generator. Like most homes in this area, they did not have electricity. The people who she wanted photographed were easy to identify, dressed in matching lappa print with a vibrant aqua, rich purple, and soft gold that complemented the freshly painted aqua-colored walls in the living room. Here, she posed for photos with her family members including her husband who I asked to join us inside. He had been keeping company with

a small group under a tree that offered a picturesque backdrop of green foliage. When he saw me with the camera, he questioned who I was and after explaining that John asked me to come take photographs, he consented to also being photographed with his friends. It was my first time having met him after years of spending time in this community; he was usually away in Monrovia, leaving the care of the home in several adopted children to John's mother. He took on much of the responsibility for decision-making by virtue of being the oldest boy in the house. Therefore, recognition and status as the man of the house was bestowed upon him. As I scanned the living room looking for a decent angle, I saw his chore chart hanging just across from the kitchen entrance. He developed these organizational skills out of his leadership in B4 and a joyful love for the organization. His mother links his ability to appear as a responsible person to having the experience of associating with others- friends who were now his students, international persons such as myself and those from larger partner organizations, and colleagues like Serena.

I had also photographed Serena's mother's recent graduation which was also done in high fashion with a large guest list, food and drinks, music that could be heard throughout the community, and matching tailored outfits for special guests. I cannot pretend to know either Serena or John's feelings about their own stalled education due to financial hardship as they celebrate their mothers' educational success. The gender mainstreaming policies that broke down walls for girls and women in the Sirleaf administration, connected to international support for education funding and a plethora of other opportunities, opened doors for powerful mothers. But their daughters, like Serena, were no longer reaping the direct benefits of gender mainstreaming policies for

education. The citizenship claims on the basis of biological sex, though written into national policy, were not actionable without the financial backing from private donors who were often from the international community connected to the Sirleaf administration. According to Bay and Donham (2007), "Africans, young and old, need to be able to imagine a future that will be at least as good as the past of their parents" (p. 15). Yet, these current outcomes of the previous administration's policies make it difficult for youth to even imagine a future that is good as their mothers' present. Young men like John may feel even further from realizing the benefits of coming of age under a Weah presidency- the candidate for youth. Even citizenship claims on the basis of a youth category do little to move forward the kinds of redress that Serena and John both seek through theatre-making. Their shared educational and employment 'damages,' whether as a result of international benefits for victims and perpetrators of the war which overlooked boys and men who were not directly involved in the war, or as a result of biological sex-based discrimination, link them in a shared project to express these concerns and demand changes now.

And it is in the playmaking, the rubbing of emotion against logic, norms against lived experience, action against expectation that invisible power is exposed. For John and Serena, their own values and expectations are challenged with the truth of others' lived experiences through embodied "now moments" to quote performance studies scholar Soyini Madison.[57] As actors stretch their own bodies to explore the truths of others'

[57] These extraordinary "now moments" flourish through radical empiricism demanding we pay attention to the collaborations and motions that generate them. You not only do what the subject does, but you are intellectually, relationally, and emotionally invested in their symbol making practices and social strategies

embodied experiences, there is possible transformation and these moments occur out of tension with the Other acting on the self. As Soyini Madison describes of her fieldwork with activists in Ghana, "we are never only individual but a series of transformations as can be seen only through a reflexive view of the self in double mirrors with an infinitum of possibilities"[58]. The processes of playwriting and performance allow us to be our self as other, facing the conviction of our sins against our neighbor along with our personal convictions to claim our own space and privilege according to long-held and constantly reaffirmed yet shifting cultural beliefs. When I asked John in an interview, Why he chose to work in a theatre company? He responded, "I was called to this profession, to the theatre, by God. Because I never knew how to do things on my own. Being a member of this theatre group has done much in my life like making me to be outspoken, getting to know the difference between right and wrong, especially when it comes to the gender issue". He is not overtly religious but recognizes the power of connecting his own experiences to the way religion is discussed. He continued to explain that part of addressing what he now perceived to be right and wrong included speaking up for his sisters to have the same kinds of experiences he was able to have in the theatre instead of being confined to housework and staying inside. The description above of our everyday performances in the theatre company is evidence of John's progress in recovering from

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as you experience with them a range of yearnings and desires—coperformance is a doing with deep attention to and with others. This is not a romantic or self-sacrificing absorption with Otherness, it is the tension that is at the center of dialogue—Conquergood describes this center of dialogue as mutually contrasting pulls of energies that become "destructive only when they are vented without the counter balancing pull" ("Performing" 9).

[58] Soyini Madison, D. (2006). The dialogic performative in critical ethnography. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *26*(4), 320-324.

toxic masculinity, as a performer, writer, instructor and as a family member. Though he has a long way to go if he desires to align himself with international discourses on gendered allyship, he perhaps has more in common with other "powerful mothers" whose traditional African embodied citizenship and political leadership models stem from their kinship practices in creating possibilities for their families as evidence of the ability to create possibilities for their society.

CHAPTER 5. Public Performance as Global Citizenship Education: You will know what you're getting by how it comes up

The surprise-eyed letter "oo"s in the fun-fonted words "Cartooning for Justice" pop off of the page above an image of a young man stationed at a drawing table with a few blank sheets of paper and freshly sharpened pencils. A younger child, perhaps a sibling, reaches upward towards a crumbled sheet while the young man with a wide smile and pencil in hand looks outwards inviting participation. Two local phone numbers are listed in red with a call to join the workshop being held over a period of four days in August 2018. A notable local visual arts organization is listed along with two foreign organization logos which appear to be sponsors. (Facebook promotion, July 24, 2018).

I forwarded this Facebook post for the Cartooning for Justice workshop to John, who in addition to being a Senior Arts Instructor teaching the core curriculum in music, dance and drama, often lends his talent in visual art to our production endeavors. He attended the workshop and returned a report addressed to me as the Executive Director of the theatre company including contact information for the international officials who were present representing the sponsors as well as a proposal for partnership between the theatre company and these organizations to fight for justice pertaining to war crimes in Liberia through theatre. The Facebook advertisement described made no mention of the war crimes court, for good reason as safety of the participants was a top priority. However, this framing of justice tied specifically to efforts to establish a war crimes tribunal, a contentious issue in Liberia, did not allow for a broader approach to how the Liberian youth artist attendees envisioned justice in their society. This chapter examines this visual arts workshop and an impromptu workshop rehearsal with the theatre company's Arts Instructors to understand how young artists in Liberia interact with peers and international others as a form of embodied cosmopolitanism which is further

informed by the local concept of "wulu pa miayee a nelee ya golon gerii mai" or how young people 'come up' as citizens.

This chapter addresses the unevenness of academic discourses on global citizenship education which predominantly feature perspectives of North American and European researchers and subjects to the exclusion of those from the Global South, particularly youth whose lives are often directly impacted by the implementation of policies and programs informed by this body of research (Parmenter, 2011). Moreover, it provides insight into how global citizenship education necessarily extends beyond the walls of the school to informal civic practices which are more likely to build political socialization as a key component of citizenship education according to Torney-Purta et al.'s 1999 IEA CivEd study (Quaynor, 2015). The civic actors at the center of this study range in age from mid-teens through early twenties. Some are in junior high school, nearly half are in senior high school, and others have begun college but are currently not enrolled or are pursuing technical training through a private agency due to financial constraints. In the time that I have known these young people, it has become clear to me that their families value education as a top priority, oftentimes sacrificing basic needs such as food to ensure greater educational opportunity. Most have some access to digital media, primarily Facebook, where they connect with new international online friends and maintain ties with family members in the Liberian diaspora, occasional print newspapers, multiple local and sometimes national radio stations, and regular consistent interaction with expatriates and staff from various international organizations which all serve as means of obtaining information on global current events and issues. Additionally, many

of their parents are active members of community-based organizations and local NGOs which have their own awareness projects contributing to household knowledge sharing.

The theatre company is one of the main activities that structures their lives, thus it provides a window into how they are—in the words of a community member and parent—'coming up'. By creating awareness that blends elements of indigenous theatre conventions with more recent theatre for development practice common across the Global South, measuring international discourses against their own lived experiences, and staging contentious social and political issues for local and international audiences, these young people are actualizing global citizenship practices which are often overlooked in discourses on global citizenship education. I argue that youth civic actors' embodied engagement in contentious global issues rooted in their local realities helps them develop as global citizens. This emergent citizenship captures their current civic actions which are often complicated by the constraints and possibilities posed by the international community in the shaping of Liberian citizens and an aspirational national vision.

The absence of youth from Liberia and other parts of the Global South in the global citizenship education literature necessitates local theories around how the research community deciphers what kinds of citizens are being developed, particularly in newer democracies. I begin with a local theorization through analysis of interviews with parents of what citizenship development looks like in Liberia through the vernacular of how young people 'come up.' I use this local understanding to pinpoint specific instances of what type of citizenship possibilities are enlivened through the way young people in Liberia come up or develop in relation to an openness to people, ideas and discourses

from the international community as a form of embodied cosmopolitanism derived from youth interactions with local and national authorities and international others. Finally, I apply these frames to an analysis of both, the Cartooning for Justice advocacy workshop, and a behind-the-scenes deliberation among the youth civic actors concerning staging performances related to the war crimes court in Liberia. I find that the way the youth civic actors grapple with the risks and challenges associated with this process reveal their patriotism and desire to better their nation through aligning their local practices with international discourses on justice.

Local theory: Wulu pa miayee a nelee ya golon gerii mai

Mr. Garteh and I sat on rough wooden chairs in the open classroom at the community school where the theatre company students gather. It was a Sunday morning and the surrounding area was still quiet. Slightly overcast as is common for this time of year, the classroom was fairly dim so we kept both doors open wide to provide some light beyond the pale stretches peeking through the concrete cut-out windows. Though I was not familiar with this parent as his son was a newer student in the theatre company, he had a kind smile and I was aware of his good reputation as a local tailor with a family business at the main intersection. Leaving the doors open also signaled to passerby that we had nothing to hide, which was important because a married woman meeting with a married man alone can raise suspicion. Mr. Garteh was glad to talk and learn more about the organization, expressing appreciation for the invitation to be interviewed. He excitedly shared his son's accomplishments and various community activities and leadership, much of which centered around their family's church involvement and sewing business, but also his son's involvement in student government and with the theatre company. He had

attended the previous evening's film screening and discussion of *Land Beneath Our Feet*, which documents a young Liberian's return from the United States with unseen historic footage from his home county, the area where the theatre company is based in the heart of Liberia. Mr. Garteh was glad he and his son had the opportunity to attend, explaining that a good citizen knows about his country. He shared that his son tells him that the theatre company "finds talent in you so when you go out tomorrow you should be able to do something like stand before a group and speak" (Parent interview, July 28, 2019, 8:20am GMT).

When I asked him how he can see that his son is becoming a good citizen he said, "When I see his behavior in the home, I know he will be somebody good. He doesn't make palaver (argue) with somebody outside, he takes education seriously… He wants to do something for himself". Curious, I asked, what is it that he wants to do, and how will you know he has met his goal? He answered enthusiastically:

> "Well, he'll perform it, the way he does things. If the child is coming up good the father or mother will know it. We say in our vernacular, Wulu pa miayee a nelee ya golon gerii mai - the tree that will uh.. The tree that you know, that it will be good, you will see it by what at the time it is germinating. If your orange will come up fine, at the time you put the seed under the ground and it starts to grow you will know that the orange is coming up. The way it starts coming up fine, you will look at it and say yeah, this orange will be a good orange."

I try my own understanding, "So even before the orange is there, the way the tree is growing is how you know the orange will be ok? If the tree is growing ugly, you will know the orange…" Mr. Garteh interjects, "It can't make it" as I finish by saying, "it can't be sweet." We both laugh. He finishes his explanation by summarizing:

> The tree that will bear fruit, you will know at the time it is germinating, coming up, and it bears flowers. You will know that here is my tree. I will get something from it. (Parent interview, July 28, 2019, 8:20am GMT).

In responding to a request for examples of how their child has shown good citizenship, Mr. Garteh responded, "you will know what you're getting by how it comes up" which resonated with many of the answers parents shared: being active among friends, not "walking about" or being idle in the street, speaking in front of groups and crowds, being exposed to history and culture, and having the opportunities to meet or address "big" or positioned people within Liberian society and abroad. I draw from this local theorization of citizenship development to look for ways in which the young people involved in this study are 'coming up,' particularly as they form relationships which impact their status within society allowing them to claim a space for their voices in issues of development they are often shut out of.[59] Another parent shared her expectations for the role of the theatre company in her child's development, "At the end of the day, I know what I will get from the organization. I know at the end of the day, I will get something good. If it be 20 years, I know something good I will get." (Parent interview, July 13, 2019, 8:46AM GMT).

In this way, 'coming up' is process-oriented with the promise of fruit to come as both parents described that the process will show evidence of what you will get later as a result of the youths' involvement in the theatre company. Though many of the interview respondents admitted that their expectations from an internationally-funded organization were to receive tangible benefits such as money, payment of school fees, and other

[59] Durham (2004) aims to lift the voices of youth in the literature as many disciplines have done since the 1990s, but also through analyzing relational and political claims to status such as seating arrangements in a men's circle.

material goods, many parents also described seeing a positive change in their child over time academically, socially, and in personal behavior and expression which they counted as evidence of good citizenship. These characteristics were most frequently attributed to the child's interaction with others as a key component of the theatre company which parents came to value in some cases more than having the child sell items in the market or participate more often in household tasks which have immediate and direct benefits to youth and their families. In addition, these parents expressed an appreciation for the way the theatre company kept their children from the street, being idle and roaming with bad friends.[60] In contrast, the intrinsic benefits of theatre education are harder to mark as valuable in a context where access to basic education is fraught and most families can only afford one meal a day.

According to the parents interviewed for this study, outsiders to this theatre community had mixed views, the most prominent being that with its connection to international others, there ought to be direct tangible benefits to the students otherwise it was not considered a valuable use of time for their children. Parents who advocated for the theatre company in conversations with outsiders more often cited the educational value in improved literacy and public speaking, opportunities for their children to gain exposure to other people and places, and to establish themselves positively among their peers. These are the responses that most closely align with "Wulu pa miayee a nelee ya

[60] Considering the prevalence of youth in the African urban environment, the more general youth bulge and shorter life span, Hansen (2014) asserts that the time of youth is now as youth pursue material and aspirational goals for a future that is present, "...young people are not idling, passively waiting for things to happen... While waiting, they craft interpersonal relationships that are important to their everyday existence and to their future" (p. 12). Pressing against the notion of youth being bound in waithood with the results somewhere in the future, Hansen identifies the interactions with others that shape possibilities for African youth in the present.

golon gerii mai" which captures the agricultural process of germination and the aspects of the germination process that determine how the plant will grow and the quality of the fruit it will produce. I use this concept of 'coming up' to identify instances that illuminate the unique aspects of theatre education as a process that shapes what kind of citizenship is developed as young people engage in performance-based endeavors as civic actors in Liberia.

With the proliferation of NGOs in Liberia since the end of the war and the long duration of these programs, international perceptions of Liberian youth as victims has impacted the way in which youth self-identify and self-stage in their attempts to live better lives and pursue their future aspirations (Bungu, 2019). As international organizations provide services for victims in the distribution of social services, intervene in social and cultural affairs, and advocate for specific policies, young Liberians incorporate the performance of victimcy into their daily interactions across differentially embodied power (Utas, 2011). Thus youth in Liberia are attuned to the happenings and major debates circulating in global discourses and are skilled in maneuvering possibilities and constraints presented through development policies and practices.

Youth artists, and in the case of this ethnography, civic actors who use stage and street performance to engage in public discourse, are potentially more amenable to these challenges of maneuvering possibilities and constraints across cultural and national divisions because the arts worldwide have a long history of patronage. Artists have for centuries relied on the support of benefactors to create their art and sustain their lives. This phenomenon coupled with the historical system of patronage in Liberia creates a

situation in which artists are in constant relations of negotiation with governmental, and more recently nongovernmental entities that have the funding to support creative economies. In Liberia, the bombardment of discourses does not only come from media but more prominently from the plethora of international organizations providing direct services and necessities, intervening in cultural and political issues pertaining to human rights, shaping the media often through funding initiatives in the arts and cultural sector, and even supporting advocacy efforts that align with their own agendas. Young people in Liberia have 'come up' with nearly fifteen years of these types of international interventions since the end of the civil war and deftly maneuver these systems and structures in ways that leverage their ability to push forward the vision they have for their own lives, communities, and nation while at the same time navigating the problematic constraints of having international others identify their most pressing problems and solutions.

In these contexts, staged theatre performance is dialogical in nature; according to Conquergood (1985), "This performative stance struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another" (p. 9). The tension of dialogical performance resists conclusions as the text "interrogates, rather than dissolves into, the performer" (p. 9). This performative work requires the energy to collect information, the imagination to act, think, and feel as someone else, and the courage to encounter alternatives; the process is open and ongoing. Thus, the youth artists engaged in this performance practice are engaged in an educational and research process that interrogates the performer through the careful

choices of gesture and voicing rather than accepting easy conclusions about problems, solutions, and future directions. The youth artists in this study are ‘coming up’ to ask questions through embodied performance practices that create new possibilities for their own understanding and application, rejection, or indigenization of international discourses. The youth civic actors use their embodied knowledge through performance to help others develop an aspirational national vision, sometimes with or in spite of the possibilities and constraints offered through international discourses and interventions.

Beyond resisting conclusions, Madison (2006) goes a step further than Conquergood, insisting that the dialogic performative resists conformity and yields possibilities. Performance-based work does not live only on stage, but it produces possibilities in everyday life. For Turner and Schechner (1988), in social dramas, actors engage in performative reflexivity making other "designs for living" possible (p. 24). He speaks of an entelechy of cultural performance by which performers realize their own potential through performance and how society's realized potential is made manifest on stage. Madison’s (2006) concern in the dialogic performative is for the politics of the performative as a “generative and embodied reciprocity” which yields possibilities (p. 320). Madison discusses the necessity of being both reflective and reflexive considering not just one’s actions but the implications of interactions. Secondly, Madison challenges us to consider the dialogic performative as a “distinctive kind of performance” that resists conformity and births the imaginary. These experiences are embodied and require paying attention to temporal and spatial contexts, and the relational meanings developed through interactions in specific contexts. It is in extraordinary “now moments” (p. 323) where

there is possible transformation and these moments occur out of tension with the other acting on the self. As Mr. Garteh described "coming up" asserting that he will know that his child is becoming a good citizen because "he will perform it," this ethnography explicitly details how the youth in the theatre company prepare for the stage and perform in everyday life documenting interactions with friends and superiors, musical and speech acts in personal spaces and in front of crowds, and how these interactions or performances in turn *do* something by creating possibilities and constraints in their lives, communities, and the world.

Talk of a War Crimes Tribunal in Liberia

The intense focus on the establishment of a war crimes court in current discourses on justice in Liberia has been primarily framed by international actors, though there are some Liberians who have been very vocal supporters. The following Cartooning for Justice workshop description is an example of how international organizations enter Liberia having already identified the problem and solution. Rather than rely on the Liberian artists' interpretations and local understandings of what justice looks like in Liberia, the war crimes court was prescribed as a solution to the problem of ethnic divisions, though these tensions predated the civil war (Burrowes, 2016; Ellis, 2006). The next section will reveal the nature of interactions which led to local artists' visions for justice being constrained by this narrow definition as their creative talents were conscripted in support of an international agenda of establishing a war crimes tribunal in Liberia.

Similar to the transitional justice processes undertaken by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Committee, Rwanda's Gacaca Community Courts which function alongside the UN's International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda[61], and Chile's National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was launched on June 22, 2006 with a mandate to, "foster truth, justice and reconciliation by identifying the root causes of the conflict, and determining those who are responsible for committing domestic and international crimes against the Liberian people..." (Republic of Liberia, TRC Final Report, 2009, p. 2 updated December 3, 2009). The final report of Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Committee dated June 29, 2009 captured

> over 22,000 written statements, several dozens of personal interviews and over 500 hundred live public testimonies of witnesses including actors, perpetrators, and direct victims; a national regional consultation with county stakeholders and a national conference on reconciliation and the way forward provided the Commission a national perspective of the conflict, its causes, trends, impacts and the vision and aspirations of the people of Liberia for a better future. The Commission incorporated desk research, media publications and human rights reports of very prominent international and local human rights institutions into its work. (p. vi).

Its recommendations were based on determinations regarding various types of perpetrators and their population impact primarily focused on accountability but also providing recommendations for economic crime investigation and prosecution and reparations. Accountability recommendations ranged from an extraordinary criminal tribunal to domestic criminal prosecutions, general public sanctions, and the

[61] United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals. Legacy website of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Since the ICTR's closure on 31 December 2015, the Mechanism maintains this website as part of its mission to preserve and promote the legacy of the UN International Criminal Tribunals. https://unictr.irmct.org/. See video: https://youtu.be/Q6nGK4A1UJ4 Retrieved: June 5, 2020.

establishment of a national "palava hut" commission.[62] There were further recommendations to the Government of Liberia, the diaspora, domestic Liberians, and the international community. However, at the time of writing, there still have been no official reports from the Government of Liberia or any reputable human rights organization on the status of implementing these recommendations.

Publicly-available sources on the status of the TRC recommendations in Liberia predominantly highlight the failure to establish a war crimes court. The vast majority of information regarding the recommendations of the TRC report appear in Liberian and other African media sources with a few calls to action from international human rights organizations. A recent report of Human Rights Watch[63] declares that Liberia has not met its international obligation to hold accountable those who have committed war crimes and human rights violations in accordance with the recommendations of the TRC. Other claims have been made regarding advances towards fulfillment of the TRC recommendations with one government official stating that nearly 90% of the recommendations have been fulfilled[64] through policies and programs such as free and compulsory primary education, women and children's recovery and empowerment programs and political dialogue, psychosocial recovery and empowerment for persons

[62] Palava hut initiatives are community-based, interpersonal approaches to relational and transitional justice. See Dansu, K. (2016). Mending Broken Relations after Civil War: The 'Palava Hut' and the Prospects for Lasting Peace in Liberia.

[63] Liberia Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review Regarding Impunity for Past Human Rights Violations. Human Rights Watch. October 3, 2019 5:26PM EDT. Retrieved: June 5, 2020. https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/03/liberia-stakeholder-report-united-nations-universal-periodic-review-regarding

[64] 90% of TRC Report Implemented. Daily Observer. June 17, 2015. Retrieved June 5, 2020. https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/90-of-trc-report-implemented/

with disabilities, and other benefits in relation to the growth of society though the government has not directly linked these efforts to the TRC recommendations.[65] However, as all of these sources highlight, to date, none of the parties involved in committing these atrocities during the 14-year long war have been brought to justice in Liberia. Several high-ranking Liberians have been accused, arrested, and indicted in France, Switzerland, Britain, Belgium and the United States, primarily for immigration fraud. Additionally, a Dutch timber trader was convicted and sentenced in 2017 for illegal arms trading and complicity in war crimes in Liberia and Guinea. The establishment of a war crimes court in Liberia would make it possible for perpetrators to be held accountable for their actual crimes rather than for providing false information on immigration documents. Furthermore, the court would potentially be more responsive to local understandings of justice, restoring control of the judicial process to Liberians (Clarke, 2019).

However, there is no clear public vision for addressing the issues of justice related to war crimes. Aaron Weah (2012) of the International Center for Transitional Justice asserts that the TRC has only widened the chasm between victims and perpetrators as current political elites named by the TRC as perpetrators hold the power to obstruct prosecutions. Thus, he concludes that the fulfillment of its recommendations is unlikely. Vinck et al.'s (2011) population-based survey on dispute resolution and post-conflict

[65] The 2018 annual report of Switzerland-based advocacy organization Civitas Maxima provides a detailed account of their efforts to support victims of Liberia's war crimes internationally. Retrieved June 5, 2020. https://www.civitas-maxima.org/sites/default/files/docs/2019-08/civitas_maxima_-_2018_annual_report_0.pdf

reconstruction including county-level and national data in Liberia shows that 91% of those surveyed knew little or nothing about the TRC, and that of those surveyed, only 42% had heard about the recommendations. Moreover, the survey results showed that, "Although a majority of the respondents believed the recommendations should be implemented (62%), they were generally pessimistic that it would ever happen: 45% said this would not happen and 31% believed the recommendations would be only partially implemented" (Vinck et al., 2011, p. 71). The overall lack of awareness of the TRC's specific recommendations and the widespread ambivalence in an aspirational national vision that includes the fulfillment of these recommendations in creating a more just society is cause for greater attention to be given to community-based and qualitative modes of information sharing and data collection, including through the performance work of youth artists, or in this case, civic actors.

International actors are very much involved in shaping the discourse around the war crimes tribunal in Liberia. The two organizations represented in this account are both internationally-funded and supported, with broad aims of empowerment for local communities. However, their organizational structures and mechanisms for implementation vary greatly. The Cartooning for Justice workshop was facilitated by a European legal organization that primarily empowers victims of African war crimes in their pursuit of justice. This organization is not registered in Liberia but has established partnerships and funding relationships with several organizations internationally, two of which are based in Africa. Its Board of Advisors is also comprised of an internationally diverse group, three of whom are from Africa. None of their executive board are

identified as African on their website. In Liberia, they have hosted a number of workshops and public discussions, the most recent targeting visual and theatre artists to promote awareness and informed debate. The theatre company is registered as a local Liberian NGO with a U.S.-based parallel organization that primarily provides program funding for the activities in Liberia. It operates with two separate advisory boards as per its registration status though there is some overlap amongst the Liberian board members. Only one non-Liberian serves on the Board in Liberia, and the U.S.-based board is split between Black Americans, diaspora Liberians, and an overlapping member of the domestic Liberian board. There is no executive board, but the administrative leadership team consists of U.S.-based volunteer staff concerned with fundraising and development and Liberian-based administrative and teaching staff who are paid including the Junior and Senior Arts Instructors described in the following passages.

Cartooning for Justice Workshop for Liberian Artists

My taxi passed John, a Senior Arts Instructor of the youth theatre company, who I encouraged to attend Cartooning for Justice, on Broad Street as I was heading to the second workshop to meet him. He had introduced me to the program coordinators via email in hopes that collaboration could be built from that point. I left the taxi and joined him on the sidewalk, prepared to climb the steep hill that was the only way to our destination. He laughed as I struggled slowly up the hill; he was accustomed to the long walks as an unemployed (with the exception of the theatre company) recent high school graduate, not often having the luxury of paying for transportation, especially as the prices continued to climb. After about twenty minutes, we arrived, and had to sign it at the security desk. John placed his orange Amazon fire tablet on the desk, looked at me with

pen in hand, and asked if he was a representative of B4. Here, his performance began and he intended to position himself as an independent person with his own agenda. I told him to sign in on his own behalf if it pleased him and then smiled, “You will always represent B4 whether you sign under the organization’s name or not!” I signed in after him listing my organizations as B4 Youth Theatre and University of Pennsylvania acknowledging my duals roles as Executive Director and researcher. Once we were inside, we saw that everyone was still eating breakfast. The main program coordinator, Teresa, was seated by the door, and we introduced ourselves after connecting through email. A few short moments later, the coordinators asked for help moving tables to set up the room theatre-style to watch a video. I was impressed as Teresa gave greetings and introduced each person individually, remembering their names from the previous workshop before she introduced a reporter from a prominent local newspaper. She recommended that if anyone would like to leave comments for the reporter, they should only provide their first name for safety purposes.

I took notes from the back of the room as the workshop commenced and proceeded through several clips of a documentary and discussion on truth and reconciliation processes in South Africa, Rwanda, and Peru. I also watched John seated about two-thirds of the way from the front in an aisle seat continue his performance. He straightened his blazer, crossed his right ankle over his left knee, and leaned back just enough to look collected but engaged in thought. He crossed his left arm over his chest, carefully resting his right elbow on his left hand with his right thumb and curled fingers propping his chin, his index finger extending upwards against his jawbone towards his

temple. He knew this pose and powerful variations of it from our study of Rodin's The Thinker, as a physical theatre exercise. He knew the power of this pose in sending a signal that one was paying attention, that this was a sign that the content was valuable, and that this is the kind of moment that organizers of events like this capture for media purposes. He was right; a similar photo of him at a national event on the TRC landed on a popular news media site. Like his script writing experience for the gender-based violence campaign, this is another instance of how lessons John has learned from the stage spill into the everyday as he strategically navigates the environment to maximize potential opportunities.

About halfway through the discussion, Teresa shifted the conversation to focus on existing ethnic tensions in Liberia asking how to involve the tribes[66] in these discussions on war crimes. One young man spoke up immediately giving an anecdote about someone who was willing to be prosecuted, admitted what they did, and apologized, but everyone was told just forgive him. He agreed that, "The issue is tribal lines. If you hit the big man in that tribe, you are making an attack on that tribe. Many people believe that Charles Taylor was wrongfully accused. They see him as a liberator." A young woman continued, "People will still vote for Charles Taylor today. The cost of living has increased to a level that did not happen under Charles Taylor. You kill my ma. You kill my pa. I will vote for you." John joined the discussion at this point, stating,

[66] Many scholars have shifted away from the use of the term "tribe" to using ethnic group or even nation. However, the participants in this study use the term tribe to reference the 16 people groups in Liberia. In the spirit of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, I endeavor to call people what they call themselves. Though Ngugi and others (see Liberian historian Carl Patrick Burrowes) argue that these contemporary understandings are rooted in colonialism, I recognize the validity of that argument and vary my use of the terms according to its use by those in my study.

> "War crimes court coming to Liberia will bring a lot of difficulty for those pushing it to come and we who will accept it. One, legal justice has advantages and disadvantages. Looking at the disadvantages, criminal court as a whole is rigid; [it] will not 'play baby' and create unforeseen circumstances such as hatred toward victim and perpetrator. Two, it consumes a lot of money. Three, it consumes time and will delay development. Once government focuses on this, they will forget other things like roads and schools. And four, superpowers are putting pressure on vulnerable countries to spark conflict and get the resources they want."

Teresa quickly interjects, "Or, the superpower can push for things to be peaceful so that they can also benefit." John responds, "It can cause confusion among people. I read a book: The Hidden Truth in the Liberian Civil War. I was touched that those who did not intend harm to us were the ones killed in the 13 on the beach. The court issue will spark up nationalism, imperialism (resources and diamonds)". Teresa adds, "Or I want your country to have the same kind of laws as I do." John continues, "[That's] military showcasing just to display power and exploit weakness. Liberia should reconcile. We are all family. We are brothers and sisters. We shouldn't do something that will bring shame to our tradition, pain or heartache."

John and his peers later used their visual art projects to highlight their concerns about the common discourses surrounding the Liberian civil war, the lack of a clearly documented history of what actually happened, and for John in particular, the role of international perpetrators in the war. John did not hesitate to present his conflicting views on justice despite differential power between himself and the international funders of this project even engaging in debate. Though Teresa framed the discussion around ethnic tensions, implying that injustices were a result of problems internal to Liberia, John after listening to the views of his peers, added an important perspective on the complicity and even instigation of violence at the hands of international others. For him, justice which

only sought to hold Liberians accountable for their actions during the war at the expense of resources and development which benefit the broader public was contrary to what Liberia needed. Rather than passively accept these suggestions of justice internally, he advocated for reconciliation among Liberians and accountability for the international others who benefited from the war in Liberia. Returning to address the issue of ethnicity, he asserted that the war crimes court as presented from the vantage of international others exerting their power in Liberia would bring shame on their tradition; "traditional" often being tied to governance rooted in ethnic and/or customary law. In this debate between John and Teresa, John delivers a stellar performance of his civic knowledge which extends beyond local and even national boundaries to consider global systems of power, inequality, and exploitation and how these international forces cause confusion and division at the local and national levels. John's openness to international others and their discourses, though he was not in agreement, is an example of embodied cosmopolitanism.

In effort to bolster his point and amplify his voice on these issues, he invited me to attend this session as a strategic means of getting my buy-in for a partnership between this organization and the theatre company to bring the issue of establishing the war crimes court to the public through theatre. Not only did he perform civic knowledge and public speaking skills to deliberate on contentious issues, his strategic navigations in attempting to join the two organizations demonstrates his growing knowledge of how international development funding and support mechanisms work. His performance had multiple audiences and I was one of the primary targets of his efforts. His intended move

toward civic action and engagement through theatre marks a difference from his own personal awareness and critical analysis of current events- it stands as evidence of his ability to move from speech acts as performative to civic action through the embodied practice and pedagogies of theatre in the present. He did not wait to achieve a certain status before taking civic action. This performance may be considered part of the germination process Mr. Garteh and other parents described as ‘coming up’ by which you know you will ‘get something good’ from youth as emerging citizens based on the performances they give today.

Creating Awareness/Staging Challenges

I was laying as comfortably as possible for a woman five months pregnant during Liberia’s dry season in a living room that doubled as the apartment building’s storage space with the windows open on a thin mattress and plastic woven mat to provide some cushion from the concrete floor. My room was too hot to even try to relax so this was the last option before moving the mattress out to the open porch right off of a small footpath. John and Josephus walked in and offered greetings. I told them I had just returned from a very long and hot walk in both rain and direct sun from Mary’s church program. John told me his adoptive mother had just matriculated from the nearby private university and the music I was hearing from another part of the community was coming from their house. He shares that his biological mother is also in town from the farm to visit for the occasion. I gave my congratulations and remained lying down. Aware that this was likely his way of inviting me to attend, I cannot deny that I felt bothered that this is the third university celebration I have been invited to for a parent of a student who cannot afford to

attend university and whose parents burden the theatre company with their expectation of scholarship provision.

I asked John if he had spoken with his friends (fellow Arts Instructors, all of whom are high school attending or recently graduated youth) about the script he wrote for the theatre company on the war crimes court. It was around 3:30pm at this point and he said he had only spoken to Josephus who was with him at the time. We called Mary, whom I had recently left at the church, to see if she could stop by. She had just gotten to her house and was having her hair braided but said she could make it by 5pm. John says that is fine. I ask him and Josephus if they have typed up their sections from the training, transferring student written responses from the day's activities to the computer to include in their daily activity reports as Arts Instructors. Both acted confused which I thought may have been on purpose as they were clearly just attempting to pass through not intending to put in office hours. I asked Josephus to go get the computer and the notes from the training. John began looking through the files as though he wasn't sure what he was supposed to type. Josephus told him the notes he was looking at were from last month's training, which he had missed because he was in Monrovia. John found the correct notes and began typing because he is better at it than Josephus. He passed Josephus the orange Amazon Fire tablet I let him use since his personal computer was broken. On the tablet, John has the script he has written for the war crimes awareness he wants the theatre company to perform and another story about impunity in Liberia through the view of mosquitoes instead of human beings. Josephus is reading the mosquito story. He and John talk a bit about the role of a jury and Josephus clarifies some

points in the story that should be more accurate. He is serving on a Grand Jury presently which is a 21 to 42 day process. The atmosphere began to shift to that of our regular rehearsal process with Arts Instructors: the mood is light with friendly discussions as a variety of tasks are addressed- reviewing materials, editing scripts, waiting on others to arrive.[67]

This impromptu meeting is a key part of the rehearsal process.[68] As Schechner (1981) describes, the rehearsal process is liminal and uses material from the makers to form a whole. According to Schechner, in theatre, it is the rehearsal, not merely the performance, which follows Turner's description of rites of passage as liminal, "The three phase process is the basic machine for the restoration of behavior" (Schechner, 1981, p. 38). The performer is first broken down from resistances through separation to a designated space for a use of time different from the ordinary. The youth regularly gather separately from others to play with what their voices and bodies are capable of doing.

[67] Interestingly, and in alignment with Omi Osun Joni Jones's (1993) observations of Yoruba theatre, Fabian (1990) describes the making of the plot as derived from discussion and improvisation rather than commitment to a fixed through-line of action or formal text. In Power and performance : ethnographic explorations through proverbial wisdom and theatre in Shaba, Zaire, Fabian describes the rehearsal process of the play "Power is Eaten Whole" largely through ethnographic descriptions of discussions around the plot, casting, and finally the performance rather than emphasizing theatre games and other aspects of devising more familiar to Western theatre. This particular limitation of an absent through-line emphasizes the seriousness of play on stage based on relationships developed amongst actors and the importance of the rehearsal in determining what gets seen by audiences as there are political ramifications for the work done while playing on stage.

[68] Another example of the seriousness of play can be found in the work of Johannes Fabian (1990) in former Zaire. Each scene he discusses is transcribed in rehearsal version and in final version. "As long as political considerations did not intervene it was agreed that the play would make its point most strongly if it were to conclude with disorder, that is, with scenes that would have been all action and little discourse. When it turned out that some accommodation was inevitable, the actors still thought that their conception could be saved if a morale, a discursive disclaimer, were added after the curtain had gone down, figuratively speaking. But that would not have satisfied authorities who are quite sensitive to tongue-in-cheek demonstrations of loyalty. So the last scene was construed such that order was reestablished by the chief, making the play unassailable without… compromising the initial intention altogether" (Fabian, 1990, p. 258). See also Chivandikwa's (2018) work on disability, performance and hidden transcripts/public transcripts

They participate in nonsensical diction exercises, breathing and projecting the voice, and experimenting with various qualities of movement. They play unfamiliar instruments. Senior Arts Instructor Mary's mother explained her experience of their rehearsals,

> "where I work, they used to practice there, people didn't know the insight so as they were practicing, blowing loud that thing, singing, people would just think it was mad noise they were making. So other people come and say what how these children come just cause noise, cause noise. Yeah until one day, I explain to them, no these children are not causing noise, they are learning. I said if you want to know, go closer get closer to them. If you get closer to them, I say, I've got my children part of it. So we tell them before when they were bringing one movie, one show, I said the people will be here and you can see what they are learning." (Parent interview, Friday, July 19, 2019, 2:20:36 PM, family home).

All of their normal rehearsal activities seem strange in any other circumstance, yet these are the experiences that inform their planning process. They have gathered around the creation of a project about the publicly and politically contentious subject of the war crimes court, an issue that youth perspectives would not be included in under other circumstances outside of this space and time.

The next phase of initiation, according to Schechner (1981), develops new behaviors in the performers through the rearrangement of old behaviors. Following a rehearsal, one girl student shared,

> All the thing where we can learn here we can learn dance, drama. I can go I tell them say that this one (demonstrates a movement from dance class with her feet) them we learn ooo. I can tell them they people them say we muhn (should) be good, we muhn muhn put strength in ourself to do the thing good. We not muhn do it weak, when we do it weak it not will be fine. Because they way the instructor them can be doing, it can make me happy. When them tell us say we muhn clap, we can clap. When them tell us we muhn stump our toes, we can do it. La it making me happy. (Student interview, Tuesday, July 30, 2019, Bong County, Liberia).

The regular attention to gestures and movements, as described by this younger student, are reinforced by the Arts Instructors until they are done as they "muhn" or should be, to perfection. This is also true of the way voice and diction, or what is referred to by the youth and their parents as public speaking, is taught through the theatre exercises. Though they are youth, because of B4's program model and structure, they are in dialogic engagement across the gerontocratic divide, having their thoughts, concerns, and proposals taken seriously. The instructional design of the rehearsal space merges their learning of community organizing strategies with vocalized and embodied exercises so that their views, perspectives, and solutions or their civic voice is lifted by confidence in their physical voice and bodily comportment. This rehearsal space encourages them to speak out in a way and on particular topics that may be considered exceptional, or inappropriate, in their daily lives. In the third phase of reintegration, this "new" behavior is practiced until it is seemingly natural leading to the closure of the ritual, the performance. Understanding rehearsal as ritual process, Schechner (1981) compares the restored behaviors of actors to film strips which are rearranged and reconstructed, as a "shuttling back and forth between the non-event and the restored event to be performed, between the significance of the event… and the details of technique that make up the performance as performance" (p. 7). Today's rehearsal is one such instance of shuttling back and forth, bringing pieces of themselves into the rehearsal, practicing new behaviors, and determining what of these performances should be staged if any.

After some time, Augustine, a Junior Arts Instructor also arrived with a friend. They continued their work and talk among themselves about what to include in the report

and how to structure it. I gave little feedback until hearing Josephus read what John has written aloud. The report was completely misleading, stating that the training started at 9am and both Jr. and Sr. Arts Instructors were there. I reminded John that he himself was two hours late and the only Sr. Instructor present. I talked to them about the importance of accurately recording what happens in trainings so that those who have taken responsibility are recognized appropriately and any issues that arise can be addressed with people who were actually there. I tell Josephus and John to add in the times that each instructor arrived since this is in their attendance book they sign upon entering the training and asked if they will lie in a report that eventually comes to me when I myself was there, what should I believe they are sending when I am not there? John smiles slightly lowering his head. The reality is that neither has regularly submitted reports from their teaching which has been an ongoing issue the National Director is attempting to rectify. Many of them experienced pay cuts for failure to produce timely reports over the vacation school months. I leave the room to get my food while they are working. I return to the mattress and begin eating. The National Director, Paul, who lives in the same complex enters shortly thereafter and begins to read over the report. As he talks aloud but to himself about the report's formatting, I encourage Josephus to watch Paul work on the report so that he is learning how to improve his computer skills.

Mary arrives shortly after 5pm as planned. John has just called her to make sure she was coming and she requested that they put together "small money" for her transportation once she arrives. Josephus hands her the 40 Liberian dollars he retrieved from the fruit basket in the room where I am staying so that she can pay the motorbike

boy. She takes one of the plastic chairs from against the wall and sits next to the boys who are gathered around various technological devices to read or write reports. I am still lying on the mattress suffering from mild heat exhaustion but talking to them between short periods of rest. Mary looks at me with pity and I just respond, "I tired oh". At this point, I'm sitting up after having helped her lift the chair. She asks why I don't just lie down and goes to get me a pillow. I thank her and lie down again. Mary begins reading over the script as John and Josephus talk with Paul about the report. Augustine returns with a friend who I am not familiar with. They also find chairs and take a seat. My American self should be very uncomfortable and my husband would probably be none-to-pleased that I'm lying in the middle of a room full of people wearing a simple lappa. But my Liberian self is perfectly fine prioritizing my attempted comfort over a supposedly professional appearance. After all, they did interrupt my nap.

After years of formal training and building ensemble through theater games and traveling together for performances, this core group (and some of our additional friends) has built up a camaraderie in which I am included, both my American self and my Liberian self[69]. All of the trust- and team-building activities such as trust falls where one person crosses her arms over her chest and falls backwards into the arms of a friend, when one person walks through a maze of chairs blindfolded only following the vocal commands of a partner, or my favorite the human bridge where two lines of people face each other and interlock their arms so that one person can crawl across have resulted in

[69] See Babcock's (1977) use of performative reflexivity. Also Omi Osun Joni Jones's (1996) "Self as Other" and Bell, D., Caplan, P., & Begum Karim's (1993) assertions on how the other becomes part of the self through familiarity and a different approach to fieldwork.

our ability to deepen this sense of ensemble in other ways. In this liminal space, we bring our care for one another as we cover each other's transportation costs, bring a chair for a friend, lend technical assistance in writing a report, tell an uncomfortable truth about attendance in front of a so-called superior. Ensemble making as praxis is on display in our use, not misuse, of time as we make room for each other to settle in, find comfort, and bring our full selves to this cherished space where we do the serious work of play-making.

Once everyone has had a chance to look over John's script, I ask him to explain the project he is proposing to the other youth Arts Instructors. He begins telling them about the organization that hosted Cartooning for Justice and their goal of having the war crimes court in Liberia. He talks about the work they have done abroad around bringing justice to victims and uses the term "impunity" to describe what is happening in Liberia. I ask him to explain what this word means as it is circulating in popular discourses this year. He tells them that it means, "where people commit atrocities during wartime, very very bad things, and still live their lives freely without any consequence." As they are all familiar with his script by this time, I ask him to share a bit about the larger project we have been asked to implement. He tells them about the possibility of enacting the international trials for local audiences. He tells them the story of Liberian warlord Jungle Jabbah's trial in Philadelphia in the United States with some help from Josephus. He frames it as something they should do to promote awareness and to encourage people to have the war crimes court in Liberia.

I then tell them that it will be up to them and their parents if they take on this project because I am concerned about the risk involved in such a project. I ask them how well they think these performances will be received in Nimba county where there is still strong support for politicians whose popularity is built on their history of violence during the war. That even if they don't use names, some people might feel like by advocating for the war crimes court, they are targeting their friend and the ethnic group that person represents and protected throughout the war. I give them Teresa's example from the Cartooning for Justice training when she said she doesn't want to be in her country sipping tea when she hears that the school the students attend has been burned down. I said likewise, I don't want to be in my country enjoying the holiday season when I hear that something bad has happened to the community school or any of the students. I also shared with them that at the same time, the mission of the theatre company is to empower them to become educated citizens through the arts and if they are truly empowered, they will be able to be active on the issues that they think are important for Liberia. I ask them if they think this is an important issue and they all agree. One of the male instructors says that it's important because the war crimes effect all of them. Paul questions this and Josephus chimes in saying, "I was directly affected. I had to walk for loooong when we were trying to get away."

Though this is all Josephus shares in this meeting, this is a story he has shared with me before. His parents' recollections of the war and understanding of its causes underlie the risk involved in this project. Their story is one Josephus knows well, and the manner in which his father recounts the historical narrative of their tribe in Liberia

evidences the ethnic tensions that remain. Months later they would insist on Josephus's separation from the theater program contextualizing their need for him to take a different path in a longer view of hardship rooted in autochthonous ideals of belonging and economic power:

I had just arrived at the house not far from the rehearsal site when a neighbor passed by and had a full-fledged conversation in Kpelle with the family. All of the adults spoke fluent Kpelle and the children understood a few words and phrases but were fluent in English because their schools teach in English and it is more often spoken at home. Once the neighbor left, it was just me and Josephus's parents. He had not yet returned from his job selling phone credit. We talked about church and the family's home village on the Guinea border. His father tells me how their forefathers actually came from Guinea in the 18th century before the Black Americans settled in Liberia because the Kpelle people spanned across the border. He mentioned something about the Mandingo people softly that I am unable to make out well. His demeanor reminded me of a conversation I had previously with Mary's father. I ask him, "Why it is that people in Liberia treat the Mandingo people differently if even the Kpelle people were migrants?" He justified the stigma explaining that the Mandingo people only came to trade and then settled over time. According to him, it was not until unification policies under Tubman in 1945 that the Mandingo people were considered citizens, and then only by law. He said that the people who were already in Liberia still considered them strangers even to today. I asked why this is the case if they have been here for so long already and even when the Kpelle people came from Guinea, though it was earlier, they met people already here on

the land. He explained that these people were also Kpelle so they could not be considered as strangers. He said this is actually what caused the war- the Mandingo people felt stigmatized by the Kpelle and went to Guinea to build their own resistance then came back to fight. I had not previously heard this telling of the war's genesis though I was familiar with the Bong County area being a major site of turbulence. Josephus's parents, like many others, shared their stories of the war with their children. And their children bring the emotional memory of these complex versions of history with them into the rehearsal space.

This perspective offers the present-day ramifications of the division of Africa by colonial powers at the Berlin Conference of 1885. The notion of nation-state citizenship and national law exist in tension with customary law that extends from pre-colonial tribal governance. The youth's proposed project was situated at the nexus of these tensions. Using theatre as an educational awareness tool that draws on the emotions of the audience to motivate change on an issue as sensitive and triggering as the war crimes court increases the risk of political violence and even physical violence associated with the implementation of their performance project. Promoting the establishment of a war crimes court as a supposedly objective solution to impunity in Liberia overlooks the variation of indigenous mechanisms for achieving justice.[70] Though these other possibilities are likely to be illuminated through performance, the risk of this project,

[70] Kamari Clarke offers detailed insights on the affective dimensions of International Criminal Court's all-African indictments demonstrating the ways in which visions of justice are racialized. Clarke, K. M. (2019). *Affective justice: The international criminal court and the pan-africanist pushback* (p. 384). Duke University Press.

which will immediately show itself as being internationally imposed, would generate a more visceral response than laughter from the audience not taking seriously the content presented. Though my primary concerns were for the safety of our students, I was also uncomfortable with the idea of being a person living in the Western world complicit in the perpetuation of a false ideal of African criminality.

This process of negotiation over the script and its performance among the youth Arts Instructors, the National Director and myself as the Executive Director stands in stark contrast to the previous example of differentiated power in creating awareness with Cartooning for Justice. As an international stakeholder in the process and products of the theatre company who has the ability to make decisions on programming and funding, the youth in the theatre company realize what is at stake in this discussion by having me involved. However, the relational aspects of our decision-making process remain open to possibility. One marked difference is our mutual reliance on each other as important players, or actors, within the company. In these moments of what appear as mere conversation, there are multiple and varied everyday performances occurring. As an international person in this context, I do not assume a dominant role, but a rather vulnerable role due to my own personal health circumstances. As is the norm in this context, we are all closely sharing space, working from a room that serves as my home, where personal resources such as money are considered communal and an ethic of care is centered in our work. Though this insider-outsider status could mark tension in the outcomes of this process, the way in which our roles are performed through these

interactions or speech acts, changes the potential for a debate over contentious issues to a space for open and honest dialogue.

With that, I told them that this is a time for them to discuss all of these considerations. John takes over the discussion again soliciting input from his "colleagues, ladies first" beginning with Mary. She laughs, pauses, then says the issue is important because just like with the Ebola awareness, there was a risk with them going out to other parts of the country, but it was necessary for the message to go out. She continues to explain,

> "And more people heard about it because they listen to us when we go and by the grace of God, the Ebola ceased and all of us were ok. None of us was sick. So this will be the same thing. Anyway we have to take some risk. We are a theatre group that carries messages through performance, so we should see reasons to educate the public about the importance of the establishment of the war crime court in Liberia."

Josephus joined in saying, "It is like the saying 'don't ask what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.' For me, I am willing to even die for my country..." The room filled with expressions of support and surprise at this. "So that I will not have to walk around with a mental problem. Like in the script, the mother wants to kill the person who murdered her children which isn't good but if when you see the person, you are just angry because there's no justice." Augustine then chimed in that he agrees and supports the project. John thanked them all for sharing then turned to the National Director Paul, a youth himself, though older than the Jr. and Sr. Arts Instructors, for comment.

Paul expressed his support for their unanimous desire to move forward with the project. He explained that this kind of partnership would require some groundwork meeting with town chiefs a week or two before they arrive in villages where they are not as familiar to make sure that things will be okay, and that they will not experience any violence from presenting the topic. A few of them laugh, but I remind them that when the international NGOs went out to villages to talk about Ebola, they were attacked because people did not trust them. I warned them that they should not think that just because they are Liberians, people will always be open to hearing from them if they are strangers in that area and that it would be important to talk to community leaders like the town chief or Zoe. They nod understanding. I mention that they will not necessarily have to perform in every community. They can choose the communities where they feel confident that they will be safe and present that in a proposal for partnership or that they can develop multiple scripts, some of which focus more on the international cases rather than on pursuing a war crimes court in Liberia. John thanks them for giving their various perspectives stating that he had not previously thought very much about the risks and that they have all given him better insight on how to think about this project.

Though there were no traditional theatre games played during this rehearsal, the ensemble was already formed, we as the players had been exposed and shared the liminal space where no one's status was of greater importance than another's despite the positional differences between the instructors at Junior and Senior status, the National Director and myself as Executive Director. Each actor added from their own experiences and the best of the "as if" moments shaped our process. Schechner (1981) explains that

the visible aspects of rehearsal are explorations of the question "as if" though the deeper structure is rooted in "bits of actual experience, fantasies, historical research" or the "is" of the performers' behaviors (p. 6). The best versions of the "as if" rehearsal possibilities make the elements of the script that are "kept" for performance. Thus, underlying the visible "is" of performance, what is shared with the audience as "real", has a foundation of countless "as if" moments deriving from the liminal space of rehearsal.[71] Schechner describes workshop rehearsal techniques as those which:

> bring up material from within those making the show or from the outside. The work of the workshop-rehearsal is to find, reveal, express these deep things, and then to integrate them into a new whole. Even while deep things are "brought up" the workshop-rehearsal must be kept open- that is liminal. The "as if" is a scalpel cutting deep into the actual lives of those making the work. And the most serious of crises of performance—the things that can destroy a work most surely—happen during workshop-rehearsals (p. 36).

This kind of work is at the heart of democratic citizenship as decisions are reached through deliberation across differences. It also marks the civic actors' openness to foreign others, myself in this case, a key component of embodied cosmopolitanism.

Back in the rehearsal, I explain that the next step will be for them to draft a memo to the Parent Advisory Committee and the Board of Directors. I tell them what they should include in the memo: a brief project summary of 2-3 sentences, bulleted arguments in support of the project, and summary explaining how they plan on mitigating risks. And that it should not be more than one page. John mentions the many connections they will make from various contacts in human rights working on these issues, and I tell

[71] Schechner (1981) in discussing restored behavior compares Stanislavski's workshop rehearsal and Turner's (1998) concept of liminality in performance.

him to add a second page that lists all of these people who have encouraged the project with their respective organizations and contact information as it will help the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) and Board to understand the scope of support for the project, both financially and politically. They ask what will happen if the PAC and Board do not agree, and I tell them they will have to communicate among themselves to find a solution. I ask them if they think this is fair and sensing their discomfort, I tell them I understand that it's a youth organization and they might not feel that it is necessary to have others make the decision for them, but that they have to remember that many of the students are children, not youth as they are. And that their parents have primary responsibility for what they do. Also, that the Board may have other priorities such as maintaining connections that have been beneficial over the years such as with particular political officials who might take offense to this project. John said that he thought about that too as a strong supporter of our organization was implicated in the TRC report.

I also encourage them to lobby the PAC and Board. We talk about how you don't just write a policy proposal and hope for the best, but you talk with people who can push the idea. We talk about who is on the board, how many are Liberians, who they have already met, who they have been in contact with and how they can reach out to make sure their voices are heard on this issue. They gain a new energy realizing the connections they would be able to utilize to move the project forward, and John said he will call my husband encouraging him to persuade me. I tell them that I'm not having a say on this particular issue because I don't want to be the person who encourages or discourages if things do not go as planned. I said the decision can rest with the PAC and Board. I make

sure they all have both of my Liberian phone numbers and my U.S. number and that they have contact info for the Liberian board President and the International Board Vice President. The discussions transitions to other administrative and personal matters before I ask them to please leave our apartment area so that I can continue resting.

This example highlights the negotiations among the youth performers as they weigh the risks and benefits of creating awareness on the possibility of a war crimes court in Liberia, an initiative presented to one of the student leaders by a representative of an international NGO. On the heels of election violence in 2018, the young people here contemplate the role and responsibilities of citizens to work towards the improvement of their country even when there is potential risk to their own safety or political backlash from their choice to bring this important issue to light. This example also highlights their dissatisfaction in dealing with the bureaucracy that is present within the NGO structure of even their own theatre company. Though they are leaders within the organization, they have to navigate the expectations and authority of parents regarding the kinds of activities their children should participate in, as well as, maneuver connecting with and convincing a board composed of domestic and diaspora Liberians and other American internationals that their proposal should move forward. Clay & Turner (2021) theorize adult insistence on bureaucracy in the space of youth activism as "managerialist subterfuge." They focus on the cooptation of youth visions through management strategies that render their activism politically impotent. Though I was clear about my inclinations that due primarily to physical risk, I would be uncomfortable with their project, I offered them strategies to navigate the internal bureaucracy of board and PAC approval processes.

Encouraging them to go beyond me in my role as Executive Director to directly influence other adults involved in decision-making transforms relationships of power to amplify their voices. Finally, though their voices reached the appropriate people and they were never told that they could not implement the project, without appropriate funding, their visions of implementing a theatre project to end impunity in Liberia were unfulfilled.

It is interesting that John, who was seemingly skeptical of the international push for the war crimes tribunal in Liberia during the Cartooning for Justice workshop was suddenly inspired to propose this opportunity to the theatre company with such conviction. In his memo to the board, he summarized, "This project is aimed at carrying on awareness, and performing dramas about the necessity of the War Crime court coming to Liberia in various communities, in other words serving as ambassadors of peace and Justice in Liberia." This draws on the organization's longer history of sharing educational messages with the broader public, and a more recent trend of ambassadorship that is used to set individuals apart for their ability to influence their communities.[72]

In a follow-up interview, John shared that he did not change his mind about the war crimes court, but he changed his strategy. His central concern was that "not only local war lords and excoms should be brought to justice but also financiers and profiteers" (Online Interview, Feb. 4, 2020, 12:56pm EST). He was in support of

[72] Anthropologist Amal Fadlalla (2019) describes "routing visibilities" which produces the hyper-visibility branding subaltern human rights and humanitarianism actors as role models: "the performance of humanity and the formation of a humanitarian public (are) two mutually reinforcing processes through which new activists, celebrities, role models, and their audiences are socialized into the fields of human rights of humanitarianism. These processes make it possible for emerging activist and role models to be inserted into an imagined transnational community governed by human rights and humanitarian legal and moral codes. These moral codes transcend the capacity of the nation-state" (p. 29).

establishing the war crimes court in Liberia but had legitimate concerns that things could go wrong on the ground. The issues he raised and was most concerned about were addressed later in the Cartooning for Justice workshop by a lawyer from Liberia who is a very vocal advocate for the war crimes court. From hearing the lawyer's view, John accepted that "reconciliation comes through confession and forgiveness" and this allayed his fears, giving him confidence to face the problem with sincerity and justice rather than avoiding potential ill outcomes. As a "peaceful and patriotic person," he shared that "In no way will I be in favor of war criminals to walk sky free… So the concerns I raised were in favor of the betterment of my country." He continued that in order to make sure that the court is established in a way that reduces poor outcomes, there needs to be more awareness and people need to be sensitized. He wanted the theatre company to get involved "so [his] voice could be heard, even much louder." The access to large local populations and a growing international following which he documents in his memo to the board, would be potential audiences for him to stage his concerns and amplify his voice along with his colleagues.

Discussion: Strategic Navigations

My field work demonstrates how interactions through embodied performance in the everyday contribute to or in some ways even shape the civic and citizenship practices of young people in Liberia with the consideration that their theatre practices are made possible and constrained at a meta level by the constant flow of international others through funding mechanisms and international agendas, interests, and priorities. Attention to the everyday performances between Liberian youth and actors from the international community are a key feature in these two examples that demonstrates the

power of young people's strategic navigations in shaping the way in which they are 'coming up'. In the first excerpt, Cartooning for Justice, John is centered in debate with the international representative hosting the workshop about the risks and potential problems that will be brought to bear on the Liberian public as a result of the proposed intervention of a war crimes tribunal. However, his quick about-face to present the potential for partnership with this same organization to further local dialogue on the war crimes tribunal urging our collaboration and participation in creating theatre work for local presentations at first appears to be in tension with his earlier arguments. However, John describes his navigations across the two contexts as strategic, allowing him to amplify his voice to greater audiences by joining two internationally-supported institutions to highlight local matters of concern around his own ideas of justice which involved holding accountable international perpetrators in the civil war, and adding perspectives of his theatre peers which he felt he could best accomplish through theatre. It also demonstrates ways in which young people embody global civic learning that is collaborative rather than conflictual.

As performances which do something real within society, moving the awareness efforts from visual art to the stage creates rupture in a singular or unified understanding of justice objectively as from internationals versus subjectively as Liberian youth who also see justice as being compromised by the differential power exerted by internationals in the Liberian civil war. The theatre gives way to play with these normative uses of

speech acts such as the term "bringing justice."[73] Theatrical performance opens the discussion to critically consider *justice for whom*, which is John's central concern. Whereas much scholarship has focused on the struggle of youth in Africa to choose between ethnic allegiances and nation-state patriotism, John's example is an instance of how habitus is developed through the practice of these strategic navigations making it possible to provide more nuanced representations of belonging within local tribal and ethnic groups as well as the nation-state. John offers an aspirational vision for Liberia where justice is framed by not allowing criminals to "walk sky-free." Expanding his stage and audience through the proposed partnership would allow him and his peers to speak across ethnic groups and the gerontocratic divide often further entrenched through these ethnic divisions. These strategic navigations are a form of embodied cosmopolitanism where John and his peers access the cultural ideas and perceptions of international others and repackage it for their own purposes.

The use of drama in awareness making has a long-standing history in Africa. From ritual practice to theatre for development initiatives beginning in the 1980's, drama has been shown to have an immense impact in addressing community as well as national issues (Dugga, 2018). Beyond national visions, drama is often inclusive of international visions which rub against traditional cultural ideas.[74] Drama has increasingly been used

[73] "Derrida questioned the dualism between objectivity and subjectivity, pointing toward the ways in which the two contaminate one another, need one another, and call into question any singular or unified understanding of either. While difference is still understood to produce signification, a sign may have multiple referents giving way to the play of language. It is this play that... gives way to moments of possibility" (Dixon-Roman, 2017, p. 8). Theatrical speech "plays" with the normative use of speech acts. "Where Austin, then seemed intent on separating the actor's citational practices from ordinary speech-act performances, Derrida regarded both as structured by a generalized iterability, a pervasive theatricality common to stage and world alike" (Parker & Sedgwick, 2004, p. 169).

[74] Shipley (2015) positions theatre artists as cultural experts and traces the transformations of the national theatre from its early presence as a state building project to its contemporary market-oriented functions. His engaging

as a means of communicating information and ideas around contentious issues in areas with high rates of people who do not read or write. Over this last decade of work as a theatre practitioner, I have witnessed how young people in this study use the tools of the theatre to not only share information with audiences but also as a method for collecting community input and ideas on ways to make policies and best practices actionable in communities.[75] In creating performances, students work together to analyze major issues impacting their own lives and the nation as a whole, they learn how to articulate their ideas and concerns with their peers and then with broader audiences, and they also become co-investigators in the research process required in dramaturgy to create a highly contextualized performance. By identifying thematic content for performance based on their own life experiences such as Josephus's knowledge of serving on a jury which allowed him to contribute critical information to the theatre artists' understandings of justice, and major issues in current events such as the war crimes tribunal, the young people in this ethnography are able to create democratic spaces for dialogue among themselves and with their potential audiences. They recognize the inherent risk involved in awareness making and sensitization and rely on the theatre company's organizational precedents of risk taking and methods to mitigate risk to justify their project. Josephus exclaimed that even at the risk of his life and safety, it is important to address the mental health issues of war crimes victims by promoting justice. Their ability to assert themselves as citizens who have a responsibility to the nation is apparent through their

ethnography shows that theatre [and dance] have the ability to use multiple symbolisms in the transfer across time and space allowing artists to question cultural ideas that can help shape national character.

[75] Blanks Jones, Flipping the Panopticon, 2015.

reframing of an international agenda to promote the war crimes tribunal as a key strategy for national healing.

'Coming up' in this context is about more than individual growth but establishing a collective identity within their peer group that positions them to hold space in areas where youth are often shut out. By holding physical space through embodied practice and performance, the youth are able to insert their own perspectives into national and global discourses. The notion of 'coming up' has as much to do with social and political positioning and having the ability to speak and act on contentious issues where their voices heard, if not as equal, then still as important participants in the discourses impacting social and political policies and practices. As young people act on stage, they also self-stage their potential and ability for civic action in their society and as global citizens in everyday life. The building of these civic skills for the youth in this ethnography occurs through self-staging among themselves and with international others, but also in their preparation for presenting international ideas to local audiences in ways that account for tensions pertaining to age and ethnicity.

Years of working between international and national discourses and organizations has produced in the youth in this study an ability to shape narratives and local institutional reporting practices for specific audiences as demonstrated in the false reporting which was highlighted in my rehearsal meeting excerpt. Their 'coming up' is in this way inflected by broader lessons for civil society participation in international projects; as families and communities are offered a variety of opportunities at the grassroots level to support international efforts in Liberia, the youth in this study are

well-aware of 3-5 year project cycles and how to maintain funding support for the project duration. Many parents have asked me on several occasions about the project cycle for the theatre company with this general understanding of how international organizations work with those at the grassroots level. Though this way of reporting may be perceived as unethical, it also serves as an act of cultural translation whereby local actors provide the kind of information that institutions require according to their own standards of success while performing locally in ways that are suitable for those contexts in spite of the constraints of funding institutions (Honeyman, 2016). Caruana (2014) asserts that global citizenship should focus less on international outward mobility and rather, "avert its gaze towards the constant and emergent formation and deconstruction of identities and the development of multiple perspectives about the world that are the essential components of life and citizenship in a pluralistic, interconnected and complex world" (p. 100). In this conceptualization of global citizenship education, cosmopolitanism and localism are always in conversation necessitating a proactive global citizenship rooted in the capability to make change and live ethically in global and local contexts.

As the youth civic actors in this ethnography craft their stories for each other and for audiences of both local and international stakeholders, they are demonstrating their ability to use their own lived experiences with marginalization in social and economic structures to help others see both problems and potential solutions more clearly (Campano & Ghiso, 2011; Cooke & Soria-Donlan, 2019). Moreover, and of importance to this context, staging this performance would provide a way for the youth civic actors to speak back to adults across the gerontocratic divide whereby they become people rather

than children. This transition into personhood demonstrates characteristics of citizenship through an emergent process which emphasizes “critical connections over critical mass, building authentic relationships, listening with all the senses of the body and the mind” brown, 2017). In this way, theatre performance serves as a forum where adults can "hear" youth instead of simply dismissing their ideas as children's complaints. Their efforts to amplify their voices for justice at home in Liberia do not overlook the need for similar moves towards justice for war crimes for international participants in Liberia’s civil war. Rather, they see these issues as working in tangent to spread awareness and create a more just world where there is as much accountability for imperialist attacks through the funding of war crimes as there is for those who committed gross atrocities on the ground in Liberia. The strategic navigations of these youth civic actors are evidence of an emergent citizenship, those who act now outside of the traditional pathways for civic and political participation, to amplify their voices pushing change in policy and practice and gaining space to be heard.[76]

In this ethnographic account, the young theatre practitioners encounter the challenges of internal bureaucracy and organizational risk associated with both local and

[76] In *Emergent Strategy*, Brown (2017) invokes “Visionary fiction” as “a term we developed to distinguish science fiction that has relevance toward building new, freer worlds from the mainstream strain of science fiction, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power. Visionary fiction encompasses all of the fantastic, with the arc always bending toward justice. We believe this space is vital for any process of decolonization, because the decolonization of the imagination is the most dangerous and subversive form there is: for it is where all other forms of decolonization are born. Once the imagination is unshackled, liberation is limitless” (p. #). For Brown, visionary fiction has “relevance toward building new, freer worlds” rather than reinforcing dominant narratives of power. This can be part of the function of physical movement, particularly, the question of ‘what result is this movement intended to have on one’s self, surrounding community or audience?’ The visionary power of physical movement can challenge normative views of bodies which may be harmful. Bodies in movement together creates new visions of collectives and communities as is demonstrated through the youth theatre practitioners’ ability to speak across differential power through speech acts as well as theatrical movement. The youth theatre practitioners navigate strategically as emerging citizens- those who act now to amplify their voices pushing change in policy and practice and gaining space to be heard.

international cultural expectations for working with children and maintaining strategic relationships. “Emergence emphasizes critical connections over critical mass, building authentic relationships, listening with all the senses of the body and the mind” (brown, 2017, p. 3). The stakes are high as the young people contemplate risks that could result in violence, and the ability to debate the risks and benefits with one’s peers and advocate for the voice of the collective youth performers with other stakeholders who may have more power (directors, parents, board) is a civic skill being developed through this experience (Shepler & Williams, 2017). For the youth civic actors in this study, political socialization that pushes normative boundaries is built through leadership within the theatre company. The entire discussion around whether or not they would stage performances related to the war crimes tribunal was led by Senior Arts Instructor John, very much a youth in the Liberian context in his early 20s with only a year of college under his belt and no stable employment outside of the theatre company. The other leaders centered here are positioned similarly in their society as they either just completed high school and are taking on temporary jobs or are completing their high school requirements as teenagers or in their early 20s. Though they were frustrated with the bureaucracy of the organization, the generally flat organizational structure allows them to voice their concerns directly to the National Director, himself a youth in the Liberian context as well as he is little more than 30 years old and beyond the National Director to myself as an international other with questionable youth status based on age, but due to other differences as married woman, a mother, situated in a career, and having foreign nationality would not be considered a youth in the same way. Their strategic

navigation of this discussion relied on their knowledge of my own power as John demonstrated in stating that he would contact my husband to sway my opinion on the matter, as well as, in their deep familiarity with my own cultural context as American which has permeated the Liberian civil society landscape though discourses on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Their intercultural understanding is fostered through our 'co-dependent, mutually-reinforcing and continuous' journeys, what Caruana (2014) describes as a pedagogical practice of cosmopolitanism. The structure of the theatre company impacts the way youth civic actors are 'coming up' in their ability to speak across differential power, both on stage through scripted performance and in everyday interactions as a form of embodied cosmopolitanism.

Thirty years after these kinds of transnational and international interventions, young people in Liberia possess an awareness of the 'other' as always political. They have been politically socialized to navigate national and international structures, systems, and interactions in ways that lift possibilities for their forward trajectories while attempting to avoid the pitfalls of complete reliance on either. The nation-state governance lacks capacity and the international community's support is governed by 3-5 year funding cycles. In many ways, they are one in the same as scholars have documented how nonprofits and international development organizations act as an arm of the state to absolve the state of responsibility to its citizenry (Kwon, 2013; Ferguson, 1990; Moyo, 2009). Neither is to be fully trusted. Through these bureaucratic challenges, they face the productive dilemma of crafting an identity as a global citizen between

international discourses/organizations and local discourses/organizations while trying not to be exploited by either and find agency in both as an instance of how global citizenship education is actualized in informal international education contexts in the global South. The youth consider taking action through theatre as their responsibility as patriotic citizens who can tease apart what is being offered from the international community in terms of its applicability to local context and their own lived experiences.

As a form of embodied cosmopolitanism, young theatre practitioners in Liberia utilize their understandings of local audiences and international audiences to carefully craft performances that amplify their opportunities to give voice to matters of local concern that borrow from international discourses, and in turn, receive international support for local advocacy and action. These young people 'come up' as global citizens despite their inability to travel because much of the world travels to them through international development interventions for youth, health and myriad human rights issues often furthering the spread of democracy. The young people in this study have lived their entire lives with the influence of international systems of governance alongside of national systems and local systems of governance thereby creating an environment in which they learn to navigate strategically through multiple cultural expectations and norms as a trajectory towards citizenship.

Centering the experiences of youth civic actors who serve in the capacity of Arts Instructors inserts the voices of youth in the global South who are often disregarded in academic and policy discussions on global citizenship education. The flattened hierarchy of the theatre company structure and its model, rooted in community organizing

strategies, creates space for artists to bring their full selves and lived experiences to the fore. Not all performance-based organizations, even those that do devising work to create original material, operate in this fashion and may not create the kind of environment that encourages young people to push boundaries and draw possibilities and constraints a bit closer to what can be achieved in the present moment. As youth performers work collaboratively to develop a drama, they consider their own diversity of views and experiences with key social and political issues, and what they understand to be the effects of these issues on their lives and communities. Differing viewpoints could be a source of contention, but in this context, create an opportunity for the development of complex and dynamic characters which capture a multivocal assemblage of problems and solutions which address local practices while informing matters of global concern. Young artists in the global South leverage their performance practices to situate their own lives and histories in national narratives and global discourses. As youth performers craft a drama for a specific audience, they maneuver between perceptions of contentious issues among themselves, with their parents, and with international stakeholders to find options that work in the best interest of all involved. These strategic interactions shape their civic and citizenship practices, exceeding the boundaries of the classroom and Western notions of how civic and global citizenship education are conceived. Youth theatre actors as civic actors are ‘coming up’ with the experiences of speaking across the gerontocratic divide thereby asserting their personhood within their societies, they are being heard by adults in their communities and international organizations, they claim a voice in development on

issues they are often shut out of, and develop civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Youth civic actors in the global South are ‘coming up’ as global citizens.

Thinking of speech acts and gestures
of how far a well-placed "no" with a rigid body can go
in keeping our girls protected,
their dignity and visions of bright futures intact.
The embodied practice of performance teaches as they learn
these performative acts reflexively.
We will never know the number of injurious incidences seized by this liberatory pedagogy
which empowers youth to be their own protectors.
And for that, I am thankful.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has offered an insider's view of a practitioner turned researcher, a thin description of the challenges and triumphs of a few of Liberia's civic actors— artists who change the world through their performances. I admit to having been complicit in many of the challenges to their agency and determination to chart their own course. I also see ways that my involvement with their projects as a teacher and researcher has done the very work that I sought out to understand— how young people become empowered citizens through the arts.[77] I asked, 1) How are young people leveraging cultural production to advocate for alternatives to policies and practices impacting their wellbeing as emerging citizens? 2) In what ways do the performing arts create possibilities for collective work towards a shared project, and how are artists' productions made possible or constrained by the development agendas of donor organizations? and 3) How might the perspectives of youth be given greater authority through the use of performance ethnography as a civic practice?

[77] "Empowering young people to become educated citizens through the arts" is the theatre company's organizational mission as stated and the underlying assumption of my research questions

Across chapters, I considered the impact and interplay between the youth's cultural production and various policies or practices they identified as important for young people in service of Liberia's greater well-being. I defined cultural production broadly to include their performances, script-writing, and teaching of performance. I found that the policies and practices they identified often appeared to mirror international discourses but upon deeper investigation, were in fact far more nuanced, addressing local concerns while still holding potential for global impact. The youth in this study advocated for establishing a war crimes court in Liberia or, at a minimum, educating the public about international war crimes trials of those involved in Liberia's civil war. Their commitment to truth-telling through theatre creation exposed their own internal contradictions over gender mainstreaming policies. Their tireless Ebola outreach efforts extended from what they understood to be their responsibility as citizens and created a space for them to exercise the right to speech as they gained the attention of prominent global audiences. Youth civic actors in these instances used their performance skills and abilities to build networks, access resources from international organizations, and have their art performed and voices heard before larger and more diverse audiences.

Each chapter presented the ways in which youth engage in a shared project at different scales through some of the most visible forms of crises, heightened by the international community to shape global perceptions of Africa. The first offered the example of the mass Ebola awareness campaign that reached an estimated 300,000 people with theatre-based prevention messaging and earned the youth a place in international media. The second chapter examined the interpersonal dynamics of

scripting, performing, and teaching across gender difference on the topic of gender-based violence. The last explored youth social justice and political engagement on the contentious issue of the war crimes court through involvement with two different organizational models of youth development and training for arts and social justice. Each case presented the challenges and triumphs the youth faced in engaging with international and/or local officials and decision-makers as they strategically navigated the likelihood of exploitation and having their own voices co-opted and incorporated into narratives that counteracted their interests and vision. Theatre performance gave the youth in this ethnography the chance to tell a different story during the Ebola crisis, one in which Africans took the lead in remedying a crisis of global importance. They did so with the conviction that it was their responsibility as citizens and eagerly accepted the partnership of an iNGO because of their implicit understanding of the greater potential impact on an issue that directly effects so many globally. This example is evidence that iNGOs that support ongoing initiatives on the ground create new possibilities for solving problems as they amplify the voices, views, and perspectives of those who are directly impacted. This kind of development work puts aside the arrogance of foreign expertise and begins with the assumption that people are already working to improve their own lives. The arts are a powerful way to demonstrate the measures youth take to improve their well-being and the partnership they desire to do things differently. Artists' projects can thrive if they are not constrained by pre-determined agendas but encouraged to expose gaps and challenges in policies and practices that are unactionable locally. Those iNGOs that truly seek to contribute to the changes youth artists desire require structures that allow for flexible

leadership that is willing to change course to meet communities where they are and join them in where they desire to go.

Finally, an ethical performance ethnography presents a call-to-action to its audience. Research is an extension of the performance and becomes one more platform used to reach new audiences. Madison (2007) discusses how the ethical researcher is body-to-body with participants as co-performers all engaged in risk:

> Dialogical performance as co-performative witnessing is being there and with as a political act in the excavation of subjugated knowledges and belongings for the creation of alternative futures. Our bodies are on the line as we are willfully captured in 'leaky locations' that are always already constitutive of tactical struggles, counter-publics, and centripetal pulls (Madison, 2007, p. 829).

In the field I encountered daily risk to health and safety similar to those common to the youth actors and their communities. However, my risk was not the same as theirs for at any moment, I had the option to disengage, to detach. Therefore, the academic risk I must take is to present a call-to-action by pushing against the false division between research and practice to reorient our understandings of youth community-based performance as research approach, pedagogy, and methodology.[78] When the youth actors in this study were engaged in the risky business of Ebola awareness street drama, they not only disseminated important public health messages but collected responses from the audience that served as data about the actionability of the public health recommendation. In turn, I could advocate with the youth actors for changes in this messaging to reflect the realities

[78] Carol Lee's work has encouraged border-crossing between activism and research. Her AERA address brought together activism and cultural ecological education models. See Lee, C. D. (2017). An ecological framework for enacting culturally sustaining pedagogy. Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world, 261-273.

of life for the communities who witnessed their performances. Performance-based research to practice advances interdisciplinary inquiry and equity.

This reorientation of research and practice does not actually center the youth but the international "expert" community as the academic audience becomes the target of their ongoing collective theatre project. The goal is then to draw this audience to what it envisions as the periphery, the sites where marginalized bodies are lively, and to epistemically engage with theories from the border (Cossa, 2020). Here, youth voices gain more authority as the audience is urged through their very human emotions to connect with the stories that belong to all of us. The stage shifts from proscenium to in-the-round, to among and with us all together, merging and blurring borders between audience and actor. This is the very foundation which underlies Boalian theatre of the oppressed and liberatory approaches to performance. The performances described in this dissertation exit center stage, enter the audience, and lead them in a reflexive procession into the everyday. Ethical performance ethnography is then a civic praxis, informed as it evolves iteratively by the practice of critical collective reflection and the integration of new knowledge into the cultural products it creates as well as the model that shapes and structures its endeavors.

Drama research excavates. As one parent explained, "what the children are doing is important because maybe somebody is doing something that is not too ok and then they will see the performance. And they will see themselves in that performance and know what they are doing is wrong. They didn't know it before but when they see it, they will

know."[79] Performances buoy reality and the imaginary to teach us what is possible within ourselves and in our world (Gallagher, 2017). According to D. Soyini Madison, "the very notion of possibility rests with those who can imagine other ways that the smallest thing and the largest thing are or can be; we need the imaginary to envision the world and ourselves differently" (2006, p. 322). They excavate audience, actor, and our full personhood exposing "half-truths told and entire lies"[80] upon which we have erected entire systems and structures that continue to impact the way policies are written and practices implemented. As performances excavate, they also reveal complex truths that have been buried as Western worldviews have assumed center stage instead of operating as one piece along the borders (Cossa, 2018). Performance allows us to move in procession together at the margins, scrutinizing the art and facts that surface from the process of excavation.

Epilogue: Implications for Us All

International NGOs operating in Liberia must assess their internal policies for equity regarding intermediary partner organizations. Afterall, we are all only bodies on the borders. The measure to which we honor the knowledge, attitudes and skills that shape our capabilities towards collective human thriving determine the quality of our interactions. All interactions are performances which demonstrate how much we understand our similarities and differences as well as our willingness to participate in the unfamiliar. Reorienting understandings of global citizenship through cosmopolitanism

[79] Parent interview. July 28, 2019.
[80] Maya Angelou's poem, "In a Time."

enable the youth in this study to access local and national resources and knowledge. However, embodying foreign sensibilities and knowledge in order to perform global citizenship is a matter of necessity not a matter of taste or preference. Both iNGOs and the youth they serve must perform from a place of reflexivity in order to create sustainable, equitable change.

The long duration of international development organizations' presence in Liberia and the pervasiveness of their interventions through direct provision of public goods and influence of policy casts international actors as a permanent feature in the lives of the youth artists in this study. As one interviewee in her mid-20s described of her generation and those younger, "our eyes opened in violence" and it was the international organizations that were present from their earliest memories of peace until the current moment.[81] The international community has hardened its presence in Liberia through post-conflict, security stabilization, Ebola, and now COVID-19 response efforts adopting a paternalistic position by marking Liberia as a place of persistent crisis. Development organizations must take a step back to consider what they believe and value about their target populations and how this informs their approach. They must consider if they deem local and indigenous knowledge to be valuable, and if so, their interventions need to align with the work these populations are doing and desire to do.

Youth who have such frequent encounters with international NGO personnel similarly should consider both the long- and short-term value and harm of their partnerships. The standard 3-5-year project cycle that does not lift ongoing efforts is

[81] Parent interview, July 28, 2019.

unlikely to add long-term value but can be of short-term benefit. By constantly engaging in these grant-based projects for short-term benefits, youth lose time. There are two major harms in this: first, "youth" is prolonged as the capabilities that make it possible for young people to take the lead in imagining and realizing new visions for their futures are constrained (Hansen, 2014; Honwana, 2012; Strong, 2017). The second problem is that these transactional exchanges enhance cleavages between the perceived dichotomies such as local and global, expert and beneficiary, and other false binaries that separate rather than unify. When efforts and interventions from the international community lead with immediate tangible benefits instead of sincere interest in the ideas and projects that already exist, they risk reinscribing harmful deficit-oriented perspectives that stem from and perpetuate colonial ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Though both the youth and parents in this study expressed frustrations with the theatre company for not providing tangible support as other internationally connected organizations do, several also exercised caution with this way of thinking explaining that "nothing good comes easily" and that "putting money in front of things" is not the way to achieve long-term benefits[82]. Tangible resources are quickly depleted as intangible resources, such as time and creativity, are undervalued. Projects guided by an ethos of foreign imposition seldom become sustainable because they do little to encourage the localization or indigenization that makes transferability from one context to another possible. Leading with the immediately tangible, the T-shirt, hot meal, or stipend combo, for instance, constrains the artists' ability to engage deeply in a shared project that

[82] Parent interview. July 13, 2019.

upholds their rights and responsibilities to equal citizenship in a world facing problems that require all of us to solve. As the everyday issues that touch our lives are increasingly global, these harms impede progress for our collective well-being now and in the future. We must learn to watch and listen differently and perform accordingly.

Reprise: All of Us

John: Can you hear them coming?

Serena: Who?

John: The foreigners.

Serena: That's trouble?

John: No. They are the voices of resistance. Coming with she who made herself to be one of us.

Serena: Ah, so they are coming to help.

John: They are coming to go.

The chorus emerges, circling about passerby, inviting them through gesture to join their procession. Performance is cyclical, iterative drawing audiences to the fringes to learn a new way of knowing engaging different perspectives, greater perspective from struggling along the borders where objects of resistance are pushed to the Center to undergo public scrutiny cast before enlightened eyes.

Serena: Not people at the Center but systems policies practices built on

Chorus: Half-truths told and entire lies.

John: Artists will expose our dark places and dare us to live differently. Together around the altar hand in hand. *(the procession links holding hands as in ceremony)*

Serena: To part certainly. Indeterminately.

Chorus: Funneling. Spiraling.

John: Feeling. Being the trajectory from which the danger sprung.

Serena: Let it go and seep into the painful memories of past misdeeds recorded on bodies, held in ancestral memory in the body, grafted onto babes,

Chorus: let us emerge,

Serena: anew as one human race

John: building monuments of movement and sound that can be shaped to our current needs and remind us of the path we forged to make it.

Chorus gathers tightly then all heads turn outwards, faces down, eyes closed. The circle reopens with all eyes center. Draw people together to Center a problem or a possibility, often both and use the knowledge of the whole to find a solution.

John: The issue is arts have historically been used as a tool of social reproduction, rather than rupture to systems that stigmatize the margins as lacking. We, the African people are not lacking.

Chorus: We, the youth are not lacking.

Serena: By joining the performances of Black youth, African youth, who have arguably occupied this space of deficit-oriented targeting.

Chorus: More than most. More than most.

Serena: We raise all of us to a place where we can Center issues systems structures problems rather than people.

John: and make decisions that draw on co-constructed knowledge, all of our knowledge.

Chorus: People and possibilities

John: We can Center people and possibilities, rather than issues, systems, structures which are problems. Through co-constructed

Chorus: knowledge

Serena: for a collective vision of a shared future.

John: Can you hear them coming? They who were among us. Who made themselves of us.

Serena: They are the voices of

Chorus: resistance.

Serena: We are the people who bear the problems created by us all; we are the people who together solve the problems once we realize the implications for us all.

John: Join with their voices.

Chorus: Join with our voices.

John: To join our voices may require some of us to be quieter, to practice research as co-performance, listening for cues, waiting before entering, playing off of a partner, taking risk in the moment.

Serena: Reflecting deeply.

Chorus: Reflecting often.

The procession provides a range of vantage points, it is not stagnant but small pockets of activity within the spiral condense and disperse, flowing in and out of the space but maintaining the spiral.

John: Decoupling mobility.

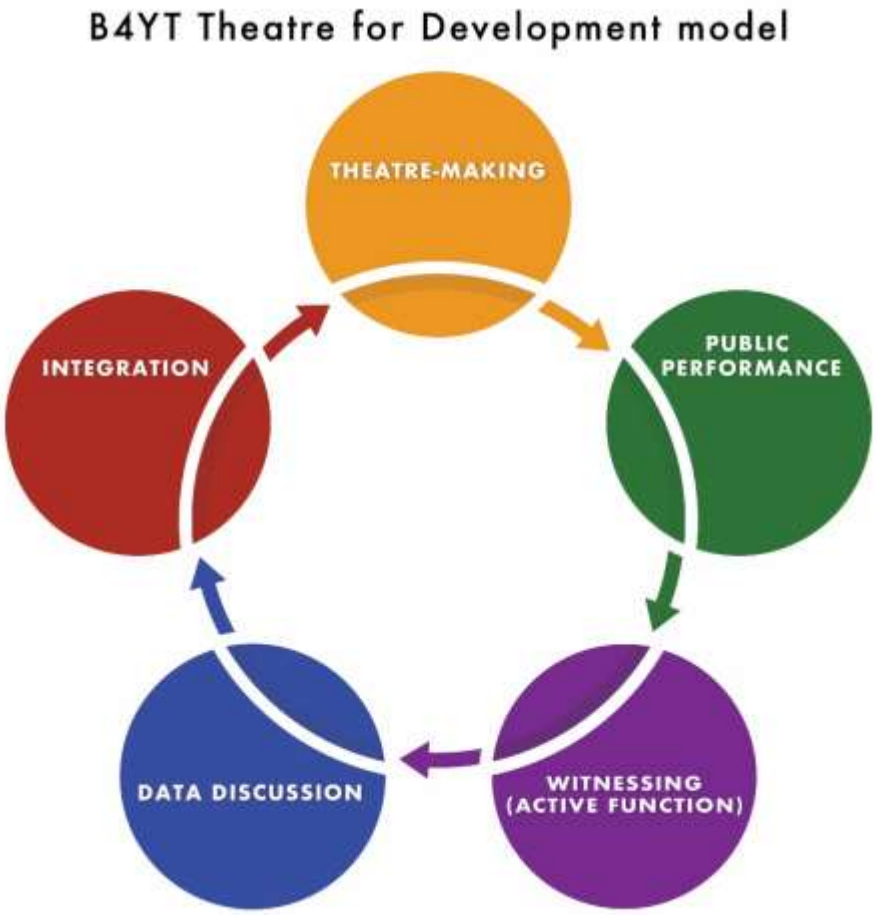
John and Serena: From the cosmos opens greater possibilities for

Chorus: uBuntu.

TO BE CONTINUED

Appendix

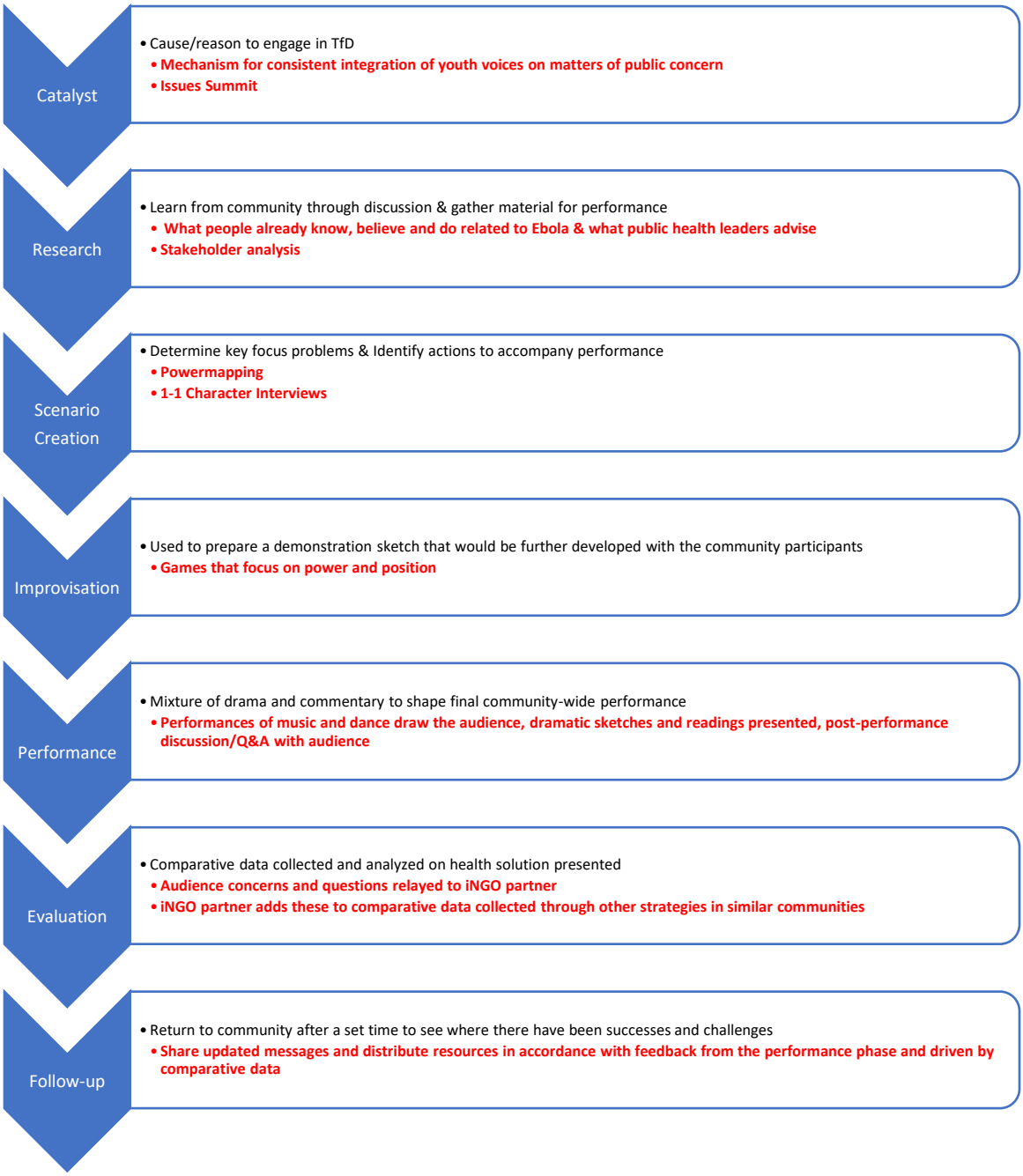
A. B4YT Theatre for Development "Integration" Model



B. Models of Theatre for Development: Kalipeni & Kamlongera, 1996.

Kalipeni, E., & Kamlongera, C. (1996). The role of" Theatre for Development" in mobilising rural communities for primary health care: the case of Liwonde PHC Unit in southern Malawi. *Journal of social development in Africa*, *11*, 53-78.

Red text: Strategies implemented in the B4 Youth Theatre Ebola-free Liberia campaign



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